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August 28, 1895.

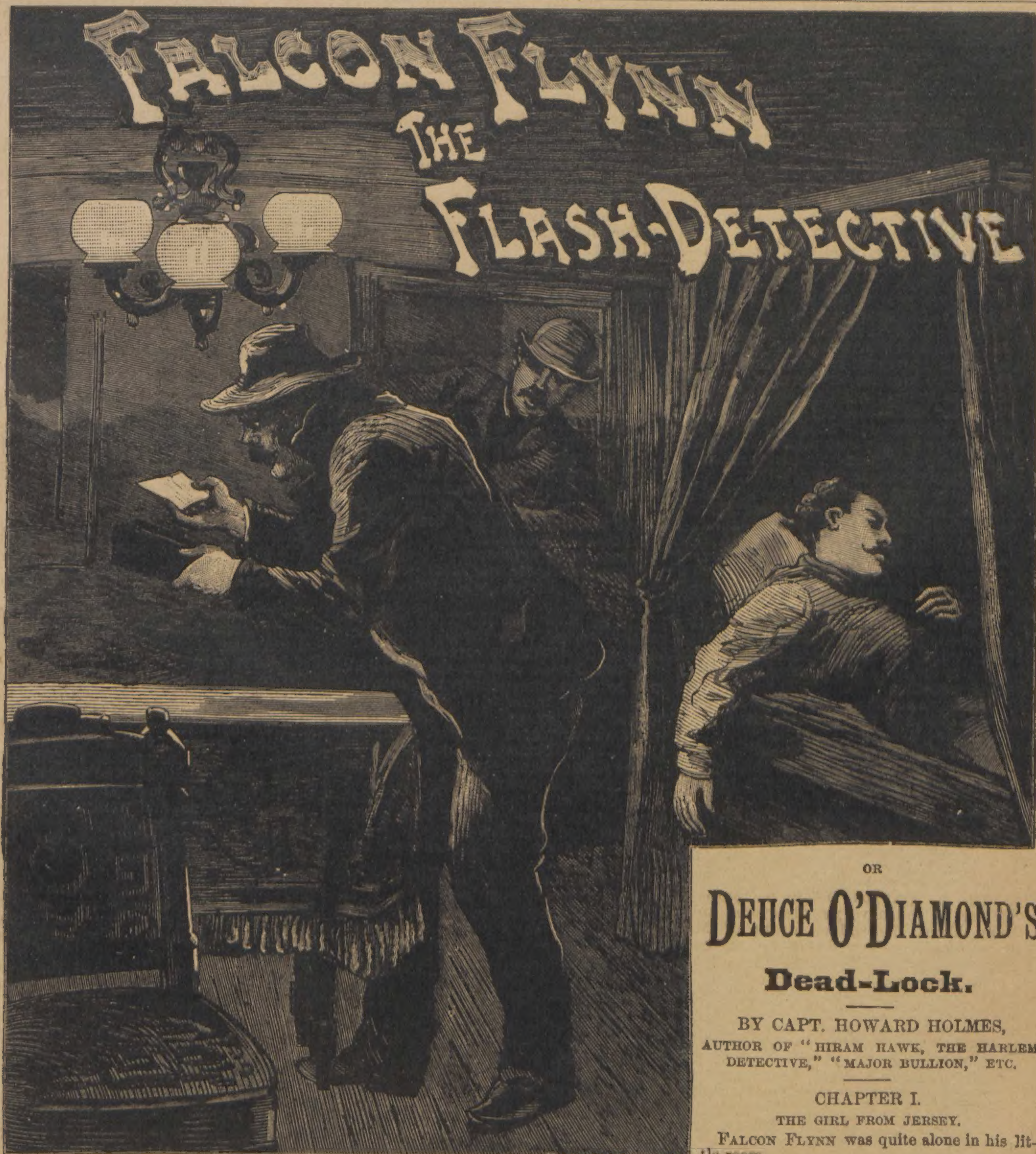
No. 879.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
93 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXVIII.



THE MAN AT THE TABLE WAS THE SAME ONE THE FLASH DETECTIVE HAD BEEN TRACKING, DEUCE O'DIAMOND'S PARTNER.

OR
DEUCE O'DIAMOND'S
Dead-Lock.

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "HIRAM HAWK, THE HARLEM
DETECTIVE," "MAJOR BULLION," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE GIRL FROM JERSEY.

FALCON FLYNN was quite alone in his little room.

The hour was rather late in the afternoon, but the detective expected a caller.

This caller he had never seen, did not know what she looked like, though he had formed an idea that she was young and good looking.

He knew that she was a Jersey girl, that she lived in an obscure village named Fernbank, a few miles from New York, and within easy railroad distance; beyond this he knew nothing.

Oh, yes; there was a letter then lying on his table which Miss Manta Kent—that was the girl's name—had written to the Police Superintendent inquiring after one Hamish Kent, who had left home several months before the date of our story.

This letter, written in a fair hand, stated that he was an inventor; that he was famous for making strange-looking locks and things, the real nature of which the writer did not profess to know; but she said in a postscript that when she came to the city she would bring one of them along.

She was expected that very day.

The Superintendent had turned her letter over to Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective, saying that, when the young lady arrived, she would be sent direct to his (the ferret's) lodgings.

It was for her he was now waiting.

As a footstep came up the stairs just beyond the door the detective picked up the letter and thrust it into an inner pocket.

She had come.

He glanced toward the door and watched it, while the sounds came nearer.

In response to the delicate raps he said "Come in," and the next moment he was face to face with the girl from Jersey.

Miss Manta Kent was not unlike many other women who are to be found in the region surrounding New York.

She was twenty, good looking, of medium height, had a fair complexion and clear blue eyes.

Her dress was a modest one of the plain traveling order, and in one of her gloved hands she carried a black satchel.

She stopped upon seeing the detective, and seemed to think for a moment that she had got into the wrong room.

Perhaps he was not her ideal of a detective, for the Falcon did not look much like the famous trail finder he was; he looked more like a young man of the town with plenty of means at his command and a desire to make away with it.

"I have been looking for you, miss," said he, as he pushed the young girl a chair, which she accepted with a smile.

"They told me I would find you in. The Superintendent said he had made arrangements for you to hear my story."

"Yes. He showed me your last letter. You have no news of him yet?"

"Not a word. The mystery is as dark as ever—as dark as it became that rainy night when he left Fernbank, taking with him the little box which I once saw in his workshop."

"I believe you mentioned it once in one of your letters to the Superintendent."

"Perhaps I did."

"You came over this afternoon?"

"I did. I did not get to see the Superintendent, but they sent me down to you at once."

"According to an understanding between the chief and myself. He turns such matters over to one of us, and this one has fallen to me."

The young girl smiled.

"Let me ask you, before we proceed further, if you have yet discovered anything about the sudden death of Mr. Ramon Rolfe, who fell down in his carriage in the Park a few nights since."

"Nothing, miss."

"I have been keeping track of that occurrence even in Fernbank, the last place in the world where one would be expected to take any interest in it. The post-mortem, as the doctors call it, developed a clot of blood at the heart."

"You have been reading the affair very closely, I see."

"I had reason to. They did not find anything else but the blood clot?"

"I think not."

"Now let me go back to Jersey for a little time."

She deposited her satchel on the table in front of the detective and looked at it with a glance of triumph.

"I've kept good watch over that satchel," said she. "I haven't once had it out of my sight. If I had found the Superintendent I should have opened it to him, but you shall see what I have fetched from Fernbank in a short time."

The Falcon said nothing.

He had already seen that, even if she was a country girl, Miss Kent was shrewd and above the average woman of the rural districts.

She appeared to have a good education, and her eyes seemed to sparkle while she talked.

Moreover, her voice was sweet and flute-like, and she, on the whole, favorably impressed the ferret-sport.

"In the first place, Hamish Kent is not my father," she continued. "I call him so, but he knows that he bears no such relation to me, and knows, too, that I am aware of it."

"We have lived alone in Fernbank for ten years."

"Fernbank is a village of perhaps thirty houses, and has one store and a post office, the latter kept by Joshua Maxwell, an old man of an inquiring mind."

"The village is about half a mile from the nearest railroad, and at the little station there we can board the trains for New York."

"Hamish Kent is a strange man."

"He had built near the house a long low building, which he occupied making the singular things which he never showed me."

"You would be surprised to hear about these odd inventions."

"The night he went away was dark and rainy."

"I heard him in the workshop till eleven, for I lay awake listening to the storm."

"The train was due at a quarter-past, and all at once I heard the door of the workshop shut and the light went out."

"I waited for him to enter the house, but he did not come."

"Presently I heard the whistle of the night express, and then heard it quit the station."

"I am firmly convinced that it carried him away."

"The next morning I broke into the workshop, but the man was gone."

"I could not find many of the delicate bits of mechanism he had been working on; they had vanished."

"There were evidences—I found them at last—that some of them had been ground to powder, while others had been burned."

"On the floor near the bench where he usually worked were the fragments of a letter, and I picked up several bits."

"These I took over to the house and tried to make something out of them."

"I am not much of a hand to solve puzzles, but, by and by, I found pieces which, when placed together, read: 'The plum is ripe. Come and pluck it.'"

Miss Kent leaned back in the chair and seemed to take a long breath.

"I also found the word 'York' at the top of what seemed to have been a sheet of paper, and then the date."

"This told me that he had been summoned to this city."

"Three months have passed away, but I have not heard from him."

"Two attempts have been made to fire the workshop, but I balked them both."

"One time—it was the last one—I saw the would-be incendiary."

"He was a heavy-set man, quite unlike Hamish Kent, and he had on a storm coat, for the night was a bad one."

"I made a noise, and he went away just in time to escape a bullet, for I had armed myself with a revolver."

"Since then the workshop has not been tampered with, though I once saw suspicious tracks near the house after a night storm."

"This is my story in brief."

"If you wish, I shall be glad to tell you all I know about the personality of Hamish Kent, which is rather conflicting."

"I have been writing to the Superintendent of Police for some time about him, but I suppose he gets so many letters inquiring after lost people that he paid but little attention to mine."

"On the contrary, miss, I can assure you your letters have been read carefully and have been the subject of investigation," said the Falcon.

"The department has been very clever, then. Have the letters been submitted to you?"

"They have. I think I can show you every one. I have them in this house."

"Then you have kept run of me. Did you expect that finally I would come on in person?"

"We have been looking for you."

"Now, Mr. Flynn," said Miss Kent, lifting the black satchel from the table, "I am going to show you what I found in the workshop the morning after the flight."

Her gloved hands began to manipulate the little fastenings, and her calmness seemed to desert her.

"You will laugh at me if I say that the sudden death of Ramon Rolfe in the Park may have been brought about by Hamish Kent's genius," she said, looking up and stopping for a moment in her work of opening the leather satchel.

"Do you really think so?"

"I do. You remember that the surgeons found a blood clot in the heart. The newspapers said so, anyhow."

"That is true."

"Why didn't they look for the deadly needle?"

"For what needle, Miss Kent?"

"Why, the one which might have killed Ramon Rolfe."

"You think it was murder, then?"

"Don't you?"

The girl from Jersey was looking strangely at the keen-eyed detective, and her face was a puzzle.

"Let me convince you by showing you what a genius Hamish Kent is. Let me show you the parts of one of his terrible death-dealing instruments, the like of which, I suspect, detective though you are, you have never seen."

By this time she had opened the satchel and had looked into it.

"I can't exhibit all," she went on. "But what I have contains the deadly shaft which can be driven into a human heart by the most delicate, and at the same time powerful, mechanism in the world."

Falcon Flynn leaned toward the speaker, whose hand had been thrust into the black carrying bag.

His face showed that he was all expectancy.

"I have lost it!" suddenly cried the girl from Jersey, falling back in her chair with a gasp.

"Lost it, miss?"

"I've been robbed!"

"How? When?"

"That I cannot tell. It is a mystery as dark as the other one. I left home with this little satchel. It hasn't been out of my hands for a moment of the time—"

She paused suddenly and began to eye the traveling bag with distended eyes.

Her color came and went and astonishment filled her countenance.

"Merciful God! the satchels have been changed!" she exclaimed. "I see it now."

She looked like a person about to faint, and the New York ferret-sport bent forward to catch her; but the next moment, by a powerful exertion of will power, she recovered.

"I see! I see! I have lost the clew!" cried the girl from Jersey. "The woman robbed me—changed the satchels."

"What woman, miss?"

"The one I met on the train!" was the reply.

CHAPTER II.

SHADOWED TO MOTHER IRON-HAND'S.

"So," remarked the detective, "you encountered a lady on the train coming to this city?"

Manta Kent did not reply for a moment; she seemed dumfounded.

"Did this woman get on the cars at Fernbank station?"

"Let me think. I am going mad. No, she did not. I did not see her till after we had left Creedmore."

"You assume, then, that she took the train there?"

"She came into our coach after we left that station, which, as you may know, is a little place of some three hundred inhabitants. There were plenty of vacant seats in our car, but she elected to sit by me. I see it all, now. It was a part of the plot to plunder me."

"But how could this strange woman know what you carried?"

"All that is dark to me. But she must have known, else why would she change satchels?"

"Very true, Miss Kent. You remember seeing her have a black satchel?"

"I remember now."

"But you say you held on to yours?"

"Really, I cannot say what took place, since I know that this is not my satchel," answered Miss Kent. "I would swear that it is not, though it is its counterpart."

"Where did you part company with her?"

"At the ferry. She told me that she was coming to New York to visit a nephew, and made herself very agreeable—enough so to lull my suspicions, at any rate."

The detective picked up the satchel and looked at it carefully.

"What is in it?" asked the girl from Jersey.

"Nothing of much value," was the reply, and the Falcon turned out upon the table the contents of the traveling bag, which consisted of a torn glove and a few packages of newspapers, evidently wrapped up for the purpose of deception.

The girl watched his investigation with a white face and in silence.

Her lips quivered at times and now and then she took a deep, fresh breath.

"It is very mysterious, isn't it?" she asked, at length.

"It's a very singular episode. The woman evidently went about the robbery systematically."

"Of course. She must have known that I was on the train."

"Whom did you tell that you were coming to New York?"

"No one."

"You must have intimated it to some one."

"No more than tell old Joshua, the postmaster at Fernbank, to hold my mail till called for."

"Now, Miss Kent, please tell me what your companion looked like."

"She had the appearance of being just what she represented herself—a widow. She mentioned that her husband had been in the railroad business, and created the impression that she was well-to-do in the world, as, indeed, she seemed to be, from her dress."

"She had a full face, and, if I were to guess her age, I should call her thirty-five. Her eyes were very black, and seemed to get a far-away look while she spoke about her husband."

"I must confess that she was an agreeable traveling companion, and, despite the importance of my trip, I could not help admiring her. The last thought to enter my head is that she was a thief."

Manta Kent stopped and felt in her pocket.

"She gave me a card, but I had not thought of it until this moment."

"Will you let me see it?"

"I put it in my satchel—mine, understand, and she got the card back again."

Both the girl and the detective laughed at the droll incident, and Detective Flynn said:

"You will let me keep the satchel, won't you?"

"It is yours. I don't want to see it any more. It revives unpleasant memories. To think how I've been duped—robbed of a clew which, I believe, in the hands of a good detective, as I feel you must be, would have been the starting point for the unraveling of a deep, dark mystery."

"Now about Hamish Kent, the missing man."

"Yes; we must not lose sight of him!" cried the girl. "There is not much in him to inspire love, but I want to find him to get at the secret of my parentage."

"He knows, then?"

"The secret belongs to him. He put me off again and again, until I grew nervous and could not sleep nights. That is one reason why I've been importuning the superintendent to hunt him up."

"The death of Ramon Rolfe became of interest to you at once, did it?"

"At once. It went through me like one of Hamish Kent's death needles. You cannot imagine how I felt when I picked up the newspaper which told how he had risen suddenly in his carriage, in the Park, and pressed his hand upon his heart to fall down dead. It was the deadly needle."

"It escaped the knives of the surgeons."

"Those men did not look far enough," exclaimed the girl. "They stopped when they found the clot in the heart. Don't you see? What would you have done if you had been one of them? Stopped just as they did, probably."

"Doubtless," answered the detective, admiring the girl's penetration.

"Do they call the death of Ramon Rolfe foul play?"

"It is regarded with suspicions since the financial affairs of the deceased have been found in bad condition."

"Where is the man who was with him in the carriage at the time?"

"We can lay hands on him at any time."

"His name?"

"It is Nox—Mr. Nixon Nox, of Tenth avenue. He is a city sharp of considerable wealth, who sometimes visited Ramon Rolfe, and often rode out with him."

"And was with him when the—the stroke came?"

"That is the evidence."

Manta Kent looked toward the window and then slowly rose.

"If you will say you are through with me I will hunt up a hotel and try and get over the startling robbery of the satchel."

"You want a quiet place, don't you?"

"The quieter the better, for the present, at least," was spoken with a slight shudder, which caught the keen eye of the man-hunter. "Could you direct me to a quiet place?"

"If you will take my advice you can get well settled down in M— Street."

"Isn't that in the Tenderloin, Mr. Flynn?"

The detective said that it was, and remarked that his fair caller knew a good deal about New York for one who lived in a little village over in Jersey.

"Pardon me," returned Manta, with a slight blush, "I have contemplated making this visit for some time, and, fearing that I would be kept in the city for an indefinite period, I made a study of localities. I had a map and guide-book, but they also were in the stolen satchel, and consequently will be of no service to me now. But I am blessed with a good memory."

"I see you are—with a remarkable memory. It may stand you in need in the near future."

"If you will recommend a quiet boarding place, even though it be in the Tenderloin, I will thank you."

The Flash Detective wrote an address upon a card and gave directions how to reach the place.

Pocketing the address, Manta Kent walked to the door and, holding her hand on the latch, looked back at the Falcon.

"Whenever I can be of service to you don't hesitate to command me," she said.

"This is only the beginning of a strange, dark case. I feel it. It is the opening chapter of a murder mystery and I am to play no unimportant part in it. I feel that, too. But I will take a look at my new quarters and get acquainted with Mrs. Iron-Hand, as you call her."

With this the door closed and the de-

tective was once more alone after what had been a singular interview.

He heard the feet of the girl from Jersey go down the hall to the steps and then lost all sound of them.

The afternoon had worn away, and while the interview had taken up more time than he anticipated, owing to its sensational features, he had made no note of time.

Now, when he went to the window, he saw that there were long shadows in the street below and that night was near at hand.

He tried to catch sight of Miss Kent, but she had vanished, and so he went back to the table and picked up the changed satchel.

He fell to examining it, taking it apart to a degree, and looking everywhere for a clew to its owner.

Meantime, down on the street, the young miss from over the river was proceeding toward the house which the detective had recommended as being a quiet place.

She felt the strange isolation of her situation, but she forgot nothing, and the verbal instructions which the Falcon had given remained uppermost in her mind.

She wondered what sort of woman her future landlady was, and why she had been dubbed Mother Iron-Hand.

It was like the name of some character in an old romance of the Middle Ages, and she thought it over while she hurried on.

Manta had not studied the map of New York without a purpose.

She followed the trail laid down by the detective as if he was actually guiding her.

In about twenty minutes she turned a corner and beheld before her the door at which she was to knock.

At the same time a figure on the opposite side of the street stopped and leaned against the wall of a house.

This person, a heavy-set man, with a dark slouch hat pulled down over beetling brows, had been tracking the girl from Jersey.

He had a dark, hard face, with a bristling mustache on the upper lip.

The girl from Fernbank did not see him.

She ran up the steps and dodged into the cramped doorway of the old-looking house, a two-story brick, not unlike many of its neighbors, and a little nervously pulled the bell.

The man across the street leaned a little forward so as not to lose sight of his quarry.

The door opened in a moment.

"Is this Mother Iron-Hand's?" asked Manta.

There was a low chuckle by a woman in the hall, and the girl was pulled into the house.

"I know who you come from when you ask that question," she said. "You're all right, child."

"I hope so."

"I know you are," and then the speaker bent forward till her lips touched Manta's ear.

"Falcon sent you here, didn't he?" she went on. "He's all right and the best tiger tracer in this city. We're friends, we are. Many's the time I've helped him to a good plum. Baggage? Got none, eh? Well, you're welcome just the same. It all goes here."

The door had already closed, and Mother Iron-Hand was conducting Manta to the "parlor."

This was a small, dingy room, and in a jiffy the gas was turned on, showing the girl from Jersey that the furniture was scant and the curtains well down.

"You're pretty. Got blue eyes. I like 'em, but never mind. There! don't blush. It seems out o' place in this house; but everything goes with Milly Iron-Hand! Ha! ha!"

The woman, who might have been fifty, with a hard-looking face, whose lines were very deep, turned and told Manta to make herself at home.

At the same time the man on the outside had crossed the street and was looking at the number over Mother Iron-Hand's door.

"666, eh?" he chuckled, with a villainous leer. "This is nuts for us. Tracked her down like nothing. Came over to tell wh she knows, didn't she? Well, we'll see about that!" and he walked away, after looking a dark, murderous farewell at the old bricks.

CHAPTER III.

HAWK AND BUZZARD.

The man who had tracked Manta Kent to Mother Iron-Hand's disappeared, and, a few minutes later, he turned up in another part of the city, in front of a house which we will enter with him.

The fellow at once made his way to a room which contained at the time a person who had become somewhat notorious in a way.

The chamber itself was not very large, but it had the appearance of being an office.

The furniture was elegant and everything betokened a good deal of wealth, or pretense of wealth.

The occupant was seated at a table upon which rested the polished heels of a pair of the latest thing in boots.

He might have been thirty-five.

His face was as round as an orange and smooth.

He looked the good liver and the keen, gilt-edged rascal at the same time.

His clothes were striped, a little loud and new.

In his shirt front glistened a pin which might have been a pure diamond, but the chances were that it was not.

There were rings on his fingers, which bristled with shiny stones—paste, like the one in his bosom.

On the inner door which Manta's pursuer had opened to get to this individual was a sign which bore the letters:

OFFICE OF THE EUREKA INVESTMENT COMPANY.

In the room a good many things went to show that this "company," whatever it was, was doing a good business.

The two men greeted each other like old friends.

They looked like birds of the same feather.

The man who had come in from the street advanced to the table, where there was another chair, which he appropriated.

"How's business?" he asked, in a snappy voice.

"Pretty good," was the reply. "Oh, we're getting there, Jack."

"It's a blessing that we are. The Eureka seems to have hit the fools, eh?"

"It has."

Jack took a cigar from a half-empty box at hand and began to send smoke rings toward the ceiling.

"What sort o' customer had you last?" he asked.

"A woman."

"Oh, they're just the fish for us, it seems. They take the bait at once."

The flashily-dressed one drew toward him a ledger-like book and opened it at a certain page.

"Here she is—Mrs. Temmie Franton, No. — Eighth Avenue," he continued, glancing at a name on the page before him. "Took ten shares in the Consolidated Ophir and went away happy."

"While we get the stuff! Ha! ha!"

"Paid fifty down and will fetch the other stuff to-morrow."

"What a lucky stroke that was!" laughed Jack, who was sometimes known as Hylo Jack. "We can make it at any time with the new scheme, and the perlice can't get on to us till we've got enough to pull out on."

"This scheme will keep us employed till we pluck the golden pigeon. Have you seen Nixon?"

"Not to-day, but say: I've struck a boss lead—ran across it kind o' accidentally. She's in town!"

"Who?"

"The girl from Fernbank. His girl, you know."

In an instant the smooth-faced rascal was leaning across the table with expectancy in his eyes.

"When did she come?"

"Got in a while ago, I guess. Can't have been in the city very long. I tracked her a little."

"Does he know?"

"Not yet, I guess. You know that she's been thinking of coming on for some time to hunt old Kent. Well, she's here now and I guess that's her mission."

The manager of the Eureka ran his hand over his face and smiled.

He was happy.

"Well, if she's here and is looking after him there's a pull in the fact for us, Jack," he averred.

"Of course. I can lay my hand on her at any time, for I tracked her down."

"Where is she?"

"You couldn't guess in a month o' Sundays."

"Perhaps not, but being a stranger in New York, I suppose she's found some obscure place to stop at, or has been roped into a hole-in-the-wall where they will fleece her."

"Don't you believe it. She's stopping at Mother Iron-Hand's."

There was a quick start on the other man's part, and for a moment his face was a study.

"How in the name of thunder did she get into that web?"

"Some one must have sent her there. I tell you, Deuce—"

He was interrupted by the tinkling of the bell in the hall and Deuce o' Diamonds of the Eureka rose and left the room.

Hylo Jack sprang across the apartment and dodged behind a curtain stretched so as to hide one corner.

"Right this way," he heard his companion say as he led the visitor into the room. "We are open for business at all hours, and if we can benefit our fellow-man in any way we are always ready to do so."

The door opened and the two men entered the place.

Deuce o' Diamonds showed his visitor a chair and took his accustomed seat across the table in the arm-chair there.

The caller was a man past the middle mile-stone of life, hard of face and miserly in appearance.

He had a voice which grated like a file on iron when he spoke.

"I want to know something about your plans," said he, leaning his long, thin arms on the edge of the table and taking a long breath. "I'm thinking of investing a little surplus cash if I can find the proper place to put it. I thought you might be able to place it for me; but I couldn't get any information about the Eureka—"

"Without coming to the fountain head, eh? That's the place to come and it's right here, sir. Here's the gate which leads to Eldorado-land for those who have a little sand—I mean a little courage; and here's where we've made many a soul happy."

Behind the curtain the burly man was grinning from ear to ear, and listening with all ears to what his fellow hawk was saying.

Then followed a flowery description of a mine in the Far West and upon the table lay a map which the oily-tongued scamp explained in a manner that held the listener breathless.

Never before was such a picture of wealth drawn as was drawn there and then.

The old man was convinced that at last the gates of real wealth had been opened to him.

He drank in all that was said, and when Deuce o' Diamonds paused he was a fly securely caught in the golden web.

He was booked at once and the old man pulled out a wallet and paid down three hundred dollars for a bit of paper which was as worthless as the map of the golden dream.

Deuce o' Diamonds, eager to get rid of the fly, rose and shook hands with him.

Hylo Jack sprang from behind the curtain and began to execute a mad dance of delight in the middle of the room.

In the midst of his fun the door opened

and his partner and the old man came back.

"Certainly you can have another block if you insist," said Deuce o' Diamonds; but that moment he caught sight of Jack and stopped.

The old man stared at the burly man and his gaze became a wild look of astonishment.

"Why, it's Otway!" cried he; but Hylo Jack, turning a little white at the gills, waved him back.

"Mistaken, sir," said the fellow. "I'm not Otway nor any of his kin. You're mistaken for once, sir, and I can prove that I'm Jack Galway to your satisfaction."

"I can substantiate my friend's assertion," put in Deuce o' Diamonds. "He is a Mr. Galway, and I've been acquainted with him for years. Does his face recall the countenance of some one whom you know?"

"Roll up your sleeve, please," said the fly.

"Which one?"

"The left, sir. If there's a ring there tattooed, with a snake coiled up in it, why, all the Bible oaths in the world couldn't convince me that you're not Otway."

Hylo Jack began to take off his coat, and the following moment it had been flung across the back of a chair.

He unbuttoned his cuff and rolled up his sleeve, displaying a well-muscled arm which would have done credit to a professional pugilist.

The old investor, who was very pale and trembling, leaned forward and looked at the arm.

There was no sign of a tattoo mark on it.

While it was not white, it was clear of any disfiguring marks, and he looked over it in triumph at the old gentleman.

The investor was nonplussed.

"Where's the ring?" asked Hylo Jack.

"I—I don't see it."

"I thought so. It's not the first time I've been taken for another person. You remember, Mr. Diamond, how last summer a woman thought I was some one else?"

"Of course I do, and it took a good deal of proof to convince her of her error."

Hylo Jack lowered his sleeve and put on his coat again.

"I guess I won't take that extra block to-night," said the old man.

"Just as you feel about that. We never insist, but let our customers make their own investments though we know we have the best thing under the sun."

Hylo Jack watched the old man depart, piloted to the door by his partner, and when the latter came back he leaped forward and clutched his arm.

"It was a close shave, wasn't it?" he exclaimed. "I don't want another like it."

"A little too close for comfort," responded Deuce o' Diamonds. "He appeared to be convinced by the absence of the ring and serpent, but still there remained a lurking doubt."

"A real doubt, curse him! If he keeps rolling it over and over he'll spoil the game. Where does he live?"

Before Deuce o' Diamonds could reply Jack had turned to the ledger, or "fools' book," and looked at the last address entered there.

"I'll see him later," said he, looking up at the smooth-faced swindler, who had coolly taken up a fresh cigar.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to see that he don't spoil the game, that's all. We can't afford to be balked now."

"I didn't think he was going to be a firebrand in the camp," remarked Deuce o' Diamonds.

"He's more than that. Why, he knew me on sight, and he hadn't forgotten the little episode of seven years ago. Otway, eh? It went through me like a knife, and but for the old chemist's discovery I would have had to show him a ring and a snake or—"

"Or what, Jack?"

"Or have pinned him against the wall and choked him to death! It may come to that yet."

"Wait. Don't precipitate matters. The old pigeon's well supplied with feathers and the Eureka wants them."

"I'll watch while I wait; but, how about the secret I've discovered? I know where the girl from Fernbank is. Shall I tell Nixon?"

"Not yet. We'll make that secret worth as much as the Eureka brings us. At Mother Iron-Hand's? I know the old woman. If the girl finds Hamish Kent there's no telling what may happen."

"She'll find him if we don't prevent it. She came from a ferret's office—I tracked her from it to Mother Iron-Hand's."

"Something must be done, and at once. No more regular business for the Eureka to-night. We've got to lay a plot that will succeed, or all is up with us. What's become of Stella?"

Hylo Jack shook his head.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEEDLE OF STEEL.

At the time of the sudden death of Ramon Rolfe in the Park not much suspicion was attached to it.

The man was a person of great wealth and well known.

There was nothing about his life calculated to lead any one to suspect that he had enemies who wanted him out of the way, and the police stopped after the usual post-mortem.

The main work at the inquest was performed by a little doctor, named Julius Stemway.

He was learned in his profession, and had gained some fame as the author of several pamphlets on toxicology.

Doctor Stemway, or "Doctor Julius," as he was sometimes termed for short, lived alone in a large house, elegantly furnished.

He was a childless widower, and attended strictly to his profession, making a great deal of money out of it.

One of his rooms on the third floor back was fitted up for a laboratory, and he was sometimes to be found there when his patients called.

In the down-stairs office, which connected with the main dwelling, hung a green cord, and whenever the doctor was to be found in the laboratory, the cord was supplied with a card telling the patient to pull three times.

It was the same night of the scenes we have witnessed in the Eureka's parlors that a man entered Doctor Stemway's office and found it tenantless.

He took a seat, and looked round the room, only to catch sight of the green cord and its card.

"Up-stairs, eh?" said this personage, whose eyes were hidden behind goggles. "Up-stairs among the deadly things he writes about. What's to hinder me from going up and seeing him there?"

He left the office, crossed a hall just beyond, which let him into the main house, and ascended the broad stairs.

On the second floor he paused, as if he regretted his venture, but almost immediately proceeded.

At length the man saw a light over a door, and the next moment he turned the knob.

The door opened so easily that no one seemed to hear him, and he looked into Doctor Stemway's laboratory.

Doctor Julius was alone.

The caller made a slight noise.

Instantly the man at the bench, with a retort in his hand, turned and fell back with a start.

The two men stood face to face.

"Good-night, doctor," said the visitor.

Doctor Julius frowned.

"Didn't you read the directions attached to the cord in the lower office?"

"I did not. I didn't care to lose time waiting for you."

"I never see any one here," said the doctor.

"You will see me, if you please."

Doctor Julius waved his caller to a stool which stood near the bench, and then he folded his arms and watched him.

Doctor Julius was a handsome American.

For a moment the man on the stool looked at him through the goggles and then suddenly removed them.

"I believe I know you," said the surgeon.

"We have met before. It was at the inquest held over the little boy who was killed by the Dago in Mulberry Street last summer."

The doctor's eyes brightened.

"I remember. You are Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective."

The listener bowed and smiled, while he twirled the goggles a moment, and then laid them gently on the bench.

"You have hit it exactly," he remarked. "I am Falcon Flynn. I trust I am no intruder now, doctor."

"You are quite welcome. I am sure you would not hunt me up if there was nothing new under the sun."

"You are right. I believe you conducted the post-mortem in the case of Ramon Rolfe."

There was a quick, nervous start on Doctor Julius' part, but in a second he recovered his professional calmness.

"I handled the knife that time," said he. "Can I give you any information not given out then?"

The detective nodded.

"You might," said he. "I am in search of a little information which may be of service to me in the near future. It was a sudden death, doctor?"

"It was an instant shock. It took the man's life without warning. He was dead before he could think."

"Heart disease, you called it."

A very singular look came into the eyes of Doctor Julius.

His little body bent forward and his left hand ran along a line of phials and rested at one.

"We doctors call a great many things heart disease which really are nothing of the kind," he smiled. "It is the cavern to which we retreat when we are puzzled. I am very glad you came, Mr. Flynn. I have been waiting for you or some other person of your profession."

"Why waiting for a detective, doctor?"

"To show you what killed Ramon Rolfe."

The voice of the doctor sank to a whisper.

"Do you mean to say that you would not have hunted one of us up?"

"Possibly."

Doctor Julius removed the phial and drew from behind it a small lancet case.

This he opened and leaned still closer to the detective.

As his hand pushed the case along the bench it opened, and the lid falling back revealed a red velvet lining.

"It's empty, I see," said Falcon Flynn.

"Quite to the contrary. It contains the cause of Ramon Rolfe's death."

"The needle," cried the detective. "I see it now."

"Of course you see it. It is there."

With a pair of steel nippers Doctor Julius lifted from the lancet case a bit of steel slightly corroded.

He laid it in turn upon a piece of paper under the detective's eyes and handed him a magnifying glass.

Falcon Flynn bent over the needle with the glass at his eye, and looked in silence.

"It is very slender," he said, without looking up.

"Just so; but deadly, all the same. It is a three-sided dart, and must have been driven into the man's heart with the force of a bullet."

"That is what caused the blood-clot, and the blood-clot deceived the other doctors."

"But not yourself?"

"Not for long. I had heard of something like this. I can show you a dart similar to this which came down to me by inheritance, for my father was a doctor. In the year '36 he took from the heart of a man a dart like that one. Let me show you."

Doctor Julius opened a case at his right and took out a little flat box which resembled the lancet case.

The following moment he had placed beside the steel dart another so near like

it that the detective, who had readjusted the glass to his eye, uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"They are precisely alike, doctor."

"No, not in measurement," returned Doctor Julius. "The modern one is a trifle the longer. I place them exactly side by side. See! Then, they do not weigh the same, showing that while the hand that made the one must have known about the other."

"It looks that way."

The Falcon leaned back and looked at the imperturbable doctor.

"There was no mark—no hole, I mean—found in the dead man's clothing."

"True. A needle like this would not make a hole to be seen by the naked eye. But you see I have been fortifying myself with evidence. Here is a piece of Ramon Rolfe's coat. Take the magnifier, please."

The bit of cloth, which had evidently been cut from a garment, was placed on the bench, and the detective looked at it under the powerful lens.

"There is a tear here—"

"It is the track of the steel dart."

"Let us go back to the park episode, doctor. No report was heard."

"There need to have been none. Some powerful mechanism not connected with powder could have propelled the deadly shaft."

"How far?"

"Now you have me," smiled the doctor. "I am aware that a great deal of power can be confined in small receptacles, and bullets and darts sent a long distance. You will remember that Nixon Nox, the city sharp, and the dead man's companion, says he heard no noise, but that his friend rose suddenly and dropped dead from the vehicle."

"I recall his testimony."

"Now," and Doctor Julius lost a little color again. "No suspicious characters were seen in the park at that time by the police, but that proves nothing, for, as a rule, these wonderful guardians of the city are blind."

"The assassin might have been lurking among the bushes, or he might have passed the vehicle at the time and killed Ramon Rolfe. That is for you, Mr. Flynn."

"I'll admit that, doctor. But you have views of your own."

"I'd be a poor man if I hadn't. When you came here you had suspicions regarding Ramon Rolfe's death?"

"That is true."

"But you did not suspect that he had been killed in this strange manner, did you?"

"On the contrary, I did, doctor."

"How so?"

The detective thought of Manta Kent and her visit, but did not compromise the girl from Jersey.

"Possibly I have read of people falling dead by the steel dart, or of men dying with 'heart disease,' when, in truth, they have been killed."

"You say that you have read of such cases. Being a detective, you may have met with such?"

"Possibly. If the assassin lurked in the Park he must have known that Ramon Rolfe was to ride there."

"It might have been so, or the meeting might have been an accident."

"Nixon Nox heard no sound, and says he saw nothing."

"He modified that statement afterward to me."

"Indeed?"

"He thought he saw a man running away, but it was nearly dark, and they were coming home."

"If this be true, then the man who ran away killed Ramon Rolfe."

"That would be the natural conclusion."

"Is that yours, doctor?"

Doctor Julius appeared to have heard some one down-stairs at that moment, for he went to the door and opened it a trifle. At that instant the office bell rang.

"I must go down," he announced.

The Falcon rose and prepared to quit the laboratory with the doctor.

"No, don't come with me," commanded

Doctor Julius. "Wait for me here, and if you hear the bell ring twice shut the door, turn off the light by pressing this button, and don't make any noise. It's a case of life and death."

The doctor left the room, and the detective heard him descending the stairs.

Falcon Flynn picked up the magnifying glass and again bent over the two steel needles.

The door stood slightly ajar.

All at once he heard a loud voice, and, springing up, he darted toward the hall.

"Give it to me, for I know you have it!" said this voice, which was a woman's. "You can't deceive me! You can't lie out of it, Doctor Julius! I am here for it. I will have it or your life!"

Just then the bell tinkled twice, clear and sharp, in the laboratory, and the Falcon leaped back and shut the door.

CHAPTER V.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK.

Who and what was this woman who had come to see Doctor Julius?

Her voice was loud and commanding, as if she had power to enforce her demand.

Falcon Flynn, who had stepped back into the little laboratory, and shut the door at the same time, turned off the light and stood in dense darkness.

He no longer heard the threatening voice, but he fully expected to hear some one coming up-stairs.

He was not disappointed, for footsteps came to his hearing, but he did not open the door.

"This is your laboratory, doctor," said the same voice he had already heard.

There was no reply.

"I am here for it. I will not go off without it, so you may as well get it first as last."

In another moment the knob of the door turned and some one entered.

The Falcon could not see who it was, but he doubted not that it was the doctor.

He heard the person advance in the gloom, and at last stop where the bench was.

"He had to obey. She is here for the steel needle," passed through the detective's mind.

Presently the feet went toward the hall again, and then the door shut once more.

"Thanks!" said the unseen woman. "This is it, and you have done me a great favor. Hereafter, please keep your scalpel in its case, Doctor Julius."

They went down the stairs, the man and his caller, and that instant Falcon Flynn darted from the room and leaned over the balustrade.

By the dim light below he caught sight of the two figures ere they vanished, seemingly in the lower parlor.

As yet he had not obtained so much as a glimpse of the face of the doctor's visitor, but from the voice he inferred that she was no longer young, but capable of wielding a powerful influence.

He waited till he heard a door open and shut, and then Doctor Julius came up-stairs.

His face was deathly white.

He tottered a trifle as he entered the laboratory, which the detective had lit up for him, and he threw himself into a chair.

He did not speak.

His eyes roved to the bench, and he seemed for the first time to realize that, at the command of his visitor, he had robbed himself.

The Falcon forbore to question him.

"I did not look for her," Doctor Julius said, at last. "She was the very last person I expected to find below."

"It was a lady, then?"

"No, a demoness—one of those terrible creatures who unite a fair face with a heart as black as a vampire's. It is gone—the needle is. I had to give it to her."

"Why to her, doctor?"

"It was life or death."

"To you?"

"That's it; but not only to me. You don't know, detective though you are, what a woman can be."

"I've had dealings with some strange ones in my time—"

"But never with one like this creature," cried Doctor Julius. "I never saw her match."

"Oh, you know her then?"

"I do not. I could not tell you anything about her, her name or her history, if I was to hang to-night. I saw her but once before this visit."

"Where was that?"

"On the street."

"She seemed to know that you possessed the needle."

"She knew it—of course she did! She knew where to come, but I never told any one that I possessed it."

Falcon Flynn thought a moment.

"Did she come in a carriage?"

"I never looked. I was glad to get shut of her."

"Of course. Was she young?"

"I cannot tell you, for I am from this moment in the shadow of the same death that struck Ramon Rolfe. Some day or night you will find me dead, with one of those infernal little darts imbedded in my heart. I know it."

"Why not crush out the plot at once? You seem to think that the woman belongs to a gang of plotters."

"I will not say that. She merely said—"

Doctor Julius stopped and picked up a phial which he transferred to his lips.

A few drops of the contents of the green phial sent a red flush over his face, and his eyes got a sudden sparkle.

"I'd rather you would not hunt for her," he went on, sinking back again into the depths of the chair and looking at the detective. "If you will not—if you will not track her you will prolong my life till I can carry out the momentous project that has filled my brain for five years."

"But the hand that killed Ramon Rolfe is wanted by justice. I would have you remember that."

"Let justice wait. She has waited before this—five, ten, a hundred years."

"In some cases she has been made to wait too long."

"I'll admit it. But this time she can wait awhile."

"To be cheated in the end—to see this woman and the rest of them escape?"

"Perhaps," answered the doctor, with a faint smile. "My life is of some moment. My practice is nothing, for I don't need it to live. I have more money than the world thinks. Look here. You'll give up this trail, won't you—give it up for, say, five years?"

"That's a long time," assumed the other.

"What if you get ten thousand a year for waiting? What if you live like a king all that time with no one the wiser for the little bargain?"

The ferret-sport saw that Doctor Julius was terribly in earnest.

The man scarcely breathed now, and while he waited for the detective's reply his face grew white.

"You don't intend to bribe me, I hope?" remarked the ferret-sport.

"Call it what you will: I mean business. It's ten thousand a year for five years. That's fifty thousand, and in that time you could not earn one-quarter as much."

"But it wouldn't be right. It would be robbing justice, and you forget that I have been assigned to this particular case by the superintendent himself."

"I'll buy him off, too."

"Don't try that," warned the young detective, with a faint smile. "It might get you into serious trouble."

"But you will take the fifty thousand and let me have peace?"

"I did not come here to be bribed. I shall look after your visitor a little. I intend to look into the Rolfe mystery, for there is something dark there, that I know."

This decision seemed to knock the doctor into a limpid heap, for he passed his hand over his face and sighed.

"Then you shall not find her," he cried, savagely. "I will see to that."

"You do not mean to say that you will balk justice?"

"I do if you go from this place to track the woman who carried off the dart. I say it boldly in your presence, that if you attempt to find her, I will stand between you and victory. I guess you understand that."

The Falcon crossed the laboratory to the door where he was called to by Doctor Julius.

"Understand me," said he. "I want to see proper punishment meted out to the person whose skill drove the dart of death into the heart of Ramon Rolfe; but if you follow that woman I will baffle you."

"The trail to the right person can be found by tracking her, for she has the steel in her possession at this moment."

"That is true. But you follow her at your peril."

"I will see, doctor," returned the ferret-sport, and the next moment he was midway on the stairs.

There he halted and looked back.

The open door told him that a brilliant light filled the laboratory, but he did not go back.

On the contrary, he went on, and stood a little while in the hall at the foot of the stairs.

"Mr. Flynn," suddenly called a voice from overhead.

The detective looked up, and caught sight of the face of Doctor Julius as he leaned over the balustrade looking down at him.

"Would twice fifty thousand be an inducement?"

"No, sir."

"Paid down in advance?"

"You might make it a million, and have the bribe rejected."

A shrill little laugh full of diabolism came from above, and the face vanished.

The Falcon let himself out of the house and stood for a moment on the step.

The street was comparatively clear of people just at that time, and no one seemed to see him.

Half a block away, on the nearest corner, stood a policeman, and to him the detective went.

"Fisher, is this your beat?" asked the Falcon, recognizing the patrolman.

"It's no one else, Mr. Flynn," was the answer. "I've been here for a year and it's a pretty fair place, too."

"Did you see a woman pass within the last twenty minutes?"

"A dozen o' 'em, at least."

"But one in particular—a woman in deep black? You may have seen her come out of Dr. Stemway's office—"

"I did that very thing. I was right in front of the house when she opened the door. I remember that she saw me and dodged back a little to slip out when I passed."

"What was she like, Fisher?"

"She looked rather fair, and might have been thirty-five; but there's no telling how old the angels are."

"She was in black?"

"All in black."

"Did she pass you?"

"She passed me, and the way she walked it seemed to me that she didn't care to remain close to Tom Fisher very long."

Flynn bade the policeman good-night, with an admonition to keep an eye on Doctor Julius's office until they met again, and then he was off.

"The thief who changed satchels on the train, thus robbing Miss Kent, was a woman in black," he said to himself. "She appears in this game, no matter which way one turns. She knows Doctor Julius, and she was aware that he had in his possession the steel dart taken from the heart of Ramon Rolfe. It was murder, sure enough. He was killed in the park, but by whom and what for? As he said, this is my work—this is my mystery, and I will reach the end of this trail in spite of his threats and the woman in black."

The Falcon went straight home and opened his door.

He found on his table—it had been tossed over the transom, as such things had been done before—a message from the Superintendent of Police, brief, but startling:

"Would see you at once. We believe we have solved the mystery of the death in the Park. Haverstraw seems to have found the important clew."

The detective read the message twice and threw it on the table.

"If it is one of Haverstraw's clews, then the mystery is not solved," he laughed, and, picking up the note, he hastened from the room.

A few minutes later he walked into the private room of the superintendent, and was confronted by the handsome face of his chief.

"I guess Tom's stolen a march on you this time, Flynn," exclaimed the superintendent. "He's gone to effect the arrest of the person who he claims killed Ramon Rolfe with a steel needle."

"Who is that person?"

"Nixon Nox, the city sharp."

The Falcon made no reply.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW HAVERSTRAW FOUND—DEATH.

There was something about the city sharp called Nixon Nox which few people knew.

He was the real head of the Eureka Investment Company, which we have seen manipulated by Deuce O'Diamonds and Hylo Jack.

Mr. Nox did not care to be seen with these two precious scamps, but he was willing to lay the wires, and then lie back and wax fat on the profits.

Perhaps, if the police had taken it into their heads to go to the bottom of the Eureka, which was numbering its victims by scores, it might have come out that this man, who lived at his ease in handsome apartments on a fashionable avenue which touched Broadway—who was the friend and companion of Ramon Rolfe, the victim of the deadly needle—derived his living from the purses of the dupes of the Eureka.

But that was the truth.

Tom Haverstraw, the rival detective, thought he had a sure clew to the mysterious death in the park, and, as the superintendent had told Falcon Flynn, had gone to effect Nixon Nox's arrest.

This seemed one of the easiest things in the world, since, up to that time, the young man was not suspected, for the city had read the coroner's verdict, which said nothing about the steel needle, and knew nothing of Manta Kent's quest.

Haverstraw was a little over-confident, but was a good detective as detectives go.

Reaching Nixon Nox's quarters, in due time, after quitting Mulberry Street, he rang the bell coolly and waited.

But the door did not open.

Haverstraw rang again, with the same result, and then grew a little impatient.

He had come for his man, and did not intend to go back without him.

The door was locked, but he forced it.

He passed down a hall and entered a room to the right—an elegantly furnished place, where everything was snug, and denoted wealth.

But he was the only man there.

Haverstraw turned on the gas and flooded the parlor with soft, but penetrating, light.

Nixon Nox was not at home.

Nothing denoted sudden flight, nothing to indicate that the game had been flushed, but to Haverstraw something was "wrong."

He was quitting the room, disappointed, when he heard the front door open, and some one entered the hall.

Believing that his man was just coming home, Haverstraw made sure that the handcuffs were ready, and then settled back to seize his prey.

The door opened, and the person in the hall came in.

It was not Nixon Nox.

Instead, it was a smooth-faced man, very dark and agile, but not at all like the man wanted.

Haverstraw stepped forward.

"Good-night," he saluted.

"Good-night! You are not the gentleman of the house, I take it?"

"I am not Mr. Nox."

"Thought so. Beg pardon. I called to see him on business, and I'll go."

Haverstraw was not to be disposed of so easily.

He put himself between the man and the door, did it gracefully, but with resolution, and looked at the other.

"I came to see Nixon Nox myself," he said, at the same time. "I want to see him badly."

"So do I; but I can wait, if you can't."

"You know him, eh?"

"I've known him a few months."

"You know something about him, too?"

"Nothing beyond what he chose to tell me. I never ask a man for his secrets, assuming, of course, that all men have secrets."

The speaker was oily and smooth.

Haverstraw tried to remember where he had seen this face before.

It had crossed his path some time—he was sure of this—but when and where?

All at once everything became plain.

Once upon a time he had been called upon by a dupe of the Eureka Investment Company to investigate its manner of doing business, and behind the table of the "company" he had encountered this same smooth, oily face.

There was no doubt of it.

He made a bold move, a center-shot, did Tom Haverstraw.

"How's the Eureka coming on?" he asked.

The man started a little, but in a second had recovered his self-possession, for he smiled as he answered:

"Oh, it's all right. You don't care to invest a little, eh? Stock going up all the time."

Deuce O'Diamonds had caught second wind, and the rascal was himself again.

"Sit down," urged the detective.

"Don't care to, if you don't intend to talk business. You see, time is money with us, and we can't lose much of it. Besides, come and see us at the rooms, and we'll talk stocks all day, if you say so. Good-night, sir."

A sudden idea flashed through the detective's mind.

He had lost Nixon Nox for the time being.

Why would not this man unconsciously take him to the person he wanted for murder?

"I'll drop round in a day or so," he said.

"I dropped in to see Mr. Nox on business. Going out, eh? I'll go too!"

They passed from the house together, and the keen eyes of Deuce O'Diamonds scrutinized the door.

"Yes, come any time after ten in the morning," he said, holding out his hand to the detective. "I must be off. Will see Mr. Nox some other time."

Haverstraw looked after the sleek figure of Deuce O'Diamonds a while, and then followed it.

The man was agile, but seemed to be in no particular hurry.

For this reason he did not take a cab, and so was easily trailed.

"Maybe he'll go back to the rooms of the Eureka?" thought the Falcon's rival, but he did not.

"One minute, if you please," suddenly said a voice, and some one caught Haverstraw's sleeve.

Tom looked round and down into the coal-black eyes of a stranger.

Deuce O'Diamonds was still in sight, but had quickened his gait.

"I'm a stranger in the city," began the man who had checked the detective.

"Could you direct me—"

"Ask the policeman yonder," interrupted Tom. "I've business of importance on hand."

"Just a minute. I must ask you. Can't help it, you see. Don't believe in asking the cops. As a general thing, they don't know what you want to find out."

The grip tightened on Haverstraw's sleeve and he said sharply:

"Out with it, then!"

"I came over from Jersey—"

"That's nothing to me. Leave off preliminaries. What do you want to know?"

"I came over from Jersey, I say, and as

this is my first visit to New York I would like to know, seeing as how I'm an entire stranger here, and not acquainted with the lay of the land—"

"Look here! I can't wait all night. I'll call the cop."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. How can I reach the Bowery the quickest?"

Haverstraw broke from the man's grasp and pointed toward the nearest corner.

"Ten steps, and a whirl to the left, and you're there," he said.

"Jehosaphat! That near to it? Well, don't it beat the Jews? Say, you don't tell me—"

The shadower was free at last, but it cost him a strong backward pull and a mad exclamation.

Deuce O'Diamonds had vanished.

The interruption had cost him the trail.

He sprang away, hoping to regain lost ground, but it was useless.

"I was stopped, that I might be thrown off the trail," he grated, thinking of the man who had checked him. "I'll find out who that accomplice is, anyhow."

He turned back, but the man, too, had vanished!

The little black eyes and the thin lips, two things already engraved on his mind, were out of sight.

Haverstraw had been duped, but dared not tell it in Mulberry Street.

He hunted for the lost scent with all the pertinacity of a bloodhound.

He went back and forth over the ground and looked in every crevice of the neighborhood for his men.

Time was passing.

The superintendent was waiting for him and his prisoner.

He would go back to Nixon Nox's house, and he did so.

The door was unlocked, just as he had left it.

Once more he crossed the threshold.

The parlor was dark, for he had turned out the light; but he stepped in and found the burner.

As he struck a match a sharp cry saluted him, and a woman in black rose near the table.

"Merciful Heavens!" she cried.

Haverstraw held the match above his head and looked into the handsome face and started.

"Don't go. I have something to say to you," he said.

"Not to me! I don't know you. You can't detain me, for you are not the person I expected to find here."

"That may be, madam, but I want to talk."

"I will not. I don't know you, remember."

She drew toward the door, and Haverstraw stepped forward.

"Don't come a step nearer!" she cried, suddenly jerking from among the folds of her dress a poniard, which she held above her head in a menacing manner.

"That looks dangerous."

"It is dangerous. I am dangerous myself, and you can't stop me. Stand back!"

This only drove the detective on.

Haverstraw was noted for one thing above all others, and this was his indomitable courage.

He measured the space between them with a sudden glance, and then covered it.

His arm was dashed downward and he himself was thrown against the wall as if the woman possessed the powers of a giantess.

Her eyes fairly snapped fire.

There was nothing between poor Haverstraw and the poniard, and it had not been raised for nothing.

Down it came, accompanied by the maddest look he ever saw, and as he felt his limbs giving way under the stroke, and everything growing dark, he heard a voice at his ears:

"The dagger kills as well as the needle, don't you see! What a fool you were! You must be a detective, like the other one. There! take that!"

Haverstraw was released from the grip and allowed to slide to the floor.

Everything was dark, but still he lived.

He heard the shutting of a door.

She was go

He was in total darkness, but he crawled forward and found the table.

A terrible faintness came over him.

He pulled himself up by means of the cloth and wrote a sentence on a blotter which covered one-half of the table.

Then he sank back to die!

Haverstraw had reached the end of his last trail!

CHAPTER VII.

THE HAND OF HYLO JACK.

Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective, waited at the headquarters of the New York police a long time for Haverstraw's return, but the daring tracker came not.

The superintendent was inclined to make merry over the failure to report with Nixon Nox.

"The bird may have flown," said he. "In any event, Haverstraw will follow."

Flynn prepared to go.

"So you think Nox is not the right party?" queried the superintendent.

"I'll admit that the evidence Tom has collected is strong, and enough to warrant an arrest, but there is one thing I cannot see into."

"Well?"

"What has become of Hamish Kent, the inventor from Fernbank?"

"You believe that this man had something to do with the death of Ramon Rolfe?"

"His needle had, at any rate."

The chief was silent for a moment.

"It is a trail for you—one that will test your qualities," he remarked, at last. "If Tom comes back with Nixon Nox you shall hear of it."

The Falcon went his way.

The ferret-sport resolved to go to Mother Iron-Hand's and see Miss Kent.

He wanted to ask the young girl something which had been suggested by his interview with the superintendent.

He turned suddenly into a certain street, and kept his face toward Mother Iron-Hand's.

When near the place he saw a man cross the street just ahead.

There was a familiar look about this person's figure as it was revealed a moment in the light of the street lamp.

It vanished in the shadows of the houses.

The Falcon fell back in another second, for the man was coming toward him.

He hugged the wall as he came up, and was thrilled when he caught sight of a face which he recognized.

Flynn turned and followed.

His face was somewhat muffled, but not enough to hide it from the keen eyes of the ferret-sport.

Hylo Jack, the junior partner, the buzzard of the Eureka Investment Company, was bent on a certain mission.

His gait and general manner told this, and the Falcon resolved not to lose him this time.

He led the ferret some distance before he turned.

Then he slipped round a corner, and, dodging along the houses that lined the sidewalk, neared the river.

Nearer and nearer to the tide he went—the detective at his heels with the cunning of the fox and the shrewdness of the night-hawk.

Jack was not hard to see.

All at once he ran into a doorway and vanished.

Flynn, dashing up, found the portal slightly ajar.

There might be a trap beyond the door, but this did not frighten him.

He pushed the portal open and passed inside.

He tip-toed along a wall, and at last reached a place from which he could see a faint light.

He was looking into a sleeping-chamber, as he could see, by the poor light, but it was a neat one, for all that.

He advanced to the door which admitted him to the secrets of the room, and there he stopped.

A man in a rough coat was standing at a table examining the contents of a pocket-book under three glass globes that afforded him some light.

Behind him, in a bunk-like bed, lay the form of a man. The same light falling upon his face showed that it was youthful and handsome.

The occupant of the bed was half-dressed, as if he had not stopped to remove all his clothing, but had thrown himself wearily down upon the couch.

It was a strange and startling tableau.

Evidently he was on a robbing mission, and the contents of the pocket-book, which he must have taken from beneath the sleeper's head, had called him to that place.

As the robber turned the detective fell back and waited.

He saw the man replace the pocket-book, and heard him come toward the door.

The Falcon let him pass, and soon heard the front door shut as he went away.

In another second the ferret-sport was in the little room.

The sleeper still slept.

Flynn bent forward and roused him.

He sat up with a start, and his eyes dilated as they caught sight of the man of many trails.

"What's up?" he cried.

The detective smiled.

"You've had a visitor."

"I see. I have one now."

"But the other just went away."

"And I knew nothing of it."

"It looks that way."

"Well, what a fool I am to sleep and let people come in here and do what they please."

"That man did."

The now thoroughly aroused man thrust his hand beneath the bolster and felt the pocket-book.

"Thank God, I haven't been robbed, and it's a wonder, too," he exclaimed.

"Don't be too sure of that. You had better look."

"I will."

He leaped from the bed and went over to the table.

Falcon Flynn saw him look into the pocket-book and then utter a wild cry.

"You are right. The villain robbed me."

"I was afraid of it. He was looking at the pocket-book. How much did he get?"

"Not a dollar in money, but he took the proofs."

"What proofs?"

The young man came toward Falcon Flynn with a startling expression.

"In the first place, who are you?" he asked. "I never saw you before. I don't know but what you may be that man's accomplice—"

"Do you think I would tell you about the robbery if I were?"

"No, you wouldn't do that. But who are you?"

"My name is Flynn."

"That's not very definite. The City Directory may have a page of Flynn's."

"I am Falcon Flynn, and I am connected with the secret police of New York."

"A detective? Well, this is hardly a case for you."

The lips of the speaker came firmly together as he spoke.

"You mean that what you have lost you don't care to recover?"

"Not that. My God! no! I'd give my life almost to get back the proofs. That's what fetched that man here. What was he like? You must have seen him."

"I saw him."

"And let him get away?"

"He went off, at any rate. But I shall know him."

"That is something—that is a ray of light, anyhow. He had me at his mercy, but he didn't take anything but the proofs. There are a thousand dollars in bills in the pocket-book, and some valuable notes, but he came for the one thing—and got it, the scoundrel!"

The Falcon waited for the young man to recover.

He threw the pocket-book upon the table and sat on the edge of the couch.

"My name is Hardin Hawley," said he. "I have been living here for a year."

"I have been leading a life of ease on the surface, but really I have had a hard time of it keeping the proofs."

"You wonder what proofs they were?"

"I'll tell you, for then you may see the motive for the robbery, and it may give you a clue."

"A few days ago there died suddenly, in the Park, a man of some prominence."

"Ramon Rolfe?"

"Of course you knew that. Being a detective you would likely hear of such an occurrence."

"We know that he fell dead from his carriage while riding in the Park just after dark."

"Yes, yes. Well, that man was my brother."

"Then you cannot be Hardin Hawley."

"Call me that, anyhow. It'll do just as well as the name by which I do not care to be known just yet."

"It's hard for any one to escape the meshes of a lot of accomplished scoundrels who want all the money they can get, and who don't care how they get it."

"My brother Ramon and I have been separated for years. He did not know that I was in the city, but I've been watching him all the time, trying to keep him under protection."

"Protection?"

"Exactly. He stood in somebody's way. His money, and he had a good deal of it, was wanted by other people, and they were not choice as to the ways that would bring it to their coffers."

"Reva, as you may know, is not his child. The girl, I believe, knows this."

"The papers which were carried off just now are the proofs that she is not my brother's child."

"Somebody wanted those proofs, don't you see? They will be destroyed now. That's a part of the game."

"Then those parties don't want the world to know that Reva is not Ramon's child."

"That's it."

"How did they know you might possess those papers?"

"Ay, there's the rub," cried Hardin Hawley, with a smile. "I never intended to show them to Reva, for that would have destroyed her visions of wealth."

"But you held them over her head?"

"Not in an evil way. The truth is, I love the girl. I would sell my life for her love, which I fear I have not secured. I held the proofs that would blight her happiness, but upon my word, I never intended to expose her unless—"

He stopped, and let his gaze wander to the pocket-book.

Falcon Flynn waited.

"Pardon me. Let me stop where I am," said the other. "I was a fool to carry those proofs about on my person, but where could I have found a safer place? In a bank? They would have found them there, and, as it was, I thought I would be ready to resist the attack of the plotters."

"There is a plot, then—against the girl—against Reva Rolfe?"

"It is deep and diabolical. I hardly believe that Ramon's death came from an attack of heart disease, though the post-mortem is said to have brought that out."

"That was the verdict."

"Yes. Men who will rob a sleeping person as I was robbed will commit the greater crime—murder!"

"That is true."

"What if I had heard the man and awakened? There was a knife or a bullet for my heart!"

Hardin Hawley turned quite pale and went over to the pocket-book.

"Curse them! They got what they came for!" he grated. "What a fool I've been. Now, how can I face Reva with the story of this robbery?"

"You don't have to tell her," assumed the Falcon.

"I don't, but I will look guilty the moment I face her. By Heavens! I can't go to her. I'll go away. I should have destroyed those infernal documents. They'll force her to shame and danger now. The proofs are in their hands."

"Why not recover them?"

Hawley laughed derisively.

"That can't be done. You may be a good detective—one of the very best—but I tell you here that they hold the trumps now, and they'll win this game of gold in

spite of God, man or devil!" and the hand of Hardin Hawley came down upon the table with startling emphasis.

"I've blighted the life of the sweetest girl in New York," he added, fiercely.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PENCIL'S CLEW.

Falcon Flynn did not remain with Hardin Hawley after the young man's startling prophecy.

He was soon on the street again, and this time went back over a part of the ground by which he had tracked Hylo Jack to the house where the latter had robbed the pocket-book.

But, of course, Jack was out of sight, and not to be picked up by the cunning detective.

"Haverstraw did not show up with his man," thought Falcon, as he pushed along. "He may have missed Nixon Nox, who he believes killed Ramon Rolfe. I would like to see Nox myself. It may be my haul, after all."

He turned at the next corner and went toward Nox's house.

He knew where to find the domicile in which the young man, really the head of the Eureka Investment Company, spent some of his time and took his ease.

A little time brought the Flash Detective to the door, but his raps were not answered.

The outside of the house was dark, and nothing indicated that any one was in at that particular hour.

Out of curiosity Falcon Flynn tried the knob and, contrary to expectations, felt it turn, and saw the door swing open.

The door was unlocked.

He went in, but stopped the moment he turned on the light in the hall, for there were dark marks on the side wall.

He looked a little closer, and saw the marks of red fingers.

Was it another tragedy?

The Falcon, accustomed to startling sensations in his career, did not hesitate.

He advanced down the hall, and found the door to the right, which he opened, to enter the luxurious parlor, redolent still with the fumes of one of Nixon Nox's well-flavored cigars.

The only light in the room came from a burner flickering over the table, which had a green cloth, and he saw with it what was to be seen.

A man lay on the floor!

The tablecloth had been pulled halfway from its place as if by some spasmodic effort, and the detective sprang to the man's side.

One look was enough.

"Tom Haverstraw!" cried the detective, and the next instant he was on his knees. His rival was dead.

It needed little more than a look and a touch, and he gave both, which thoroughly convinced him.

There were blotches of blood on the tablecloth, and on the large blotter, and on the floor underneath the body were spots of the same somber hue.

Falcon Flynn believed he was the first discoverer of the second crime, and instantly thoughts of the steel needle entered his mind.

But these were soon dissipated, for when he opened the dead man's coat he saw the track of the dagger, and knew that no needle had taken this life.

He was rising from his little investigation when he heard a footstep behind him, and he started slightly as into the room came the well-known and sleekly-dressed figure of Nixon Nox.

The surprise on the city sharp's part was emphatic.

He fell back a pace and stared at the detective before he saw the body on the floor.

His face changed color twice within the space of a second; then he advanced and caught sight of the dead.

"My God! Whom have we here?" he exclaimed, advancing again and even stooping for a better look.

"Look again," coolly said the detective.

"You may recognize him."

At the same time the detective moved the light so as to let it fall full upon the

upturned face of Tom Haverstraw, and at the same time he riveted his gaze upon Nixon Nox.

The sharp shook his head.

"He's strange to me," he remarked, looking up. "Do you know him?"

"It is Tom Haverstraw, a detective."

"Did you find him here?"

"I did."

"How long ago?"

"Not over three minutes."

"In Heaven's name, what brought him to this house—and who killed him?"

"How do you know he was killed?"

A faint smile came to the city sharp's finely chiseled lips and he pointed at the dead.

"Any one can see that there is blood on my carpet near the body and there's a little on the table. It looks very much like murder, anyhow. I think if I were a detective I would pronounce it a tragedy."

"You are right, Mr. Nox. It is murder."

"But who could have done it? Here, and in my house! I went away early this evening and just came back."

"You lock your house, don't you, when you go off?"

"Yes, but did you notice the lock? I did. It was broken, showing that some one had forced his way into the house. Could it have been the dead man?"

"He cannot tell you."

"More's the pity that he cannot," was the reply. "But let's investigate. You're a friend of the detective, aren't you?"

"I'm a detective myself. My name is Falcon Flynn."

"Oh, yes," with a little start. "I've heard of you, Mr. Flynn, and I'm glad you are here."

Never was a cooler man than Nixon Nox.

He was himself again and as self-poised as a lion.

"You've searched the house, I suppose?" he said.

"Not yet!"

"Good! Then we'll do it together."

They went to work at once and searched the room.

"Here's where he may have fallen first," said the man, stopping near the wall. "There's a sprinkle of blood on the wallpaper and a little on the floor."

He had taken a little night-lamp from the desk and was holding it near the carpet.

A little trail in red led toward the table and Nixon and the detective followed it.

"Was the tablecloth awry when you came in, Mr. Flynn?" asked the man.

"It hasn't been disturbed by me."

"Looks like he didn't die right away, but pulled himself across the room to the table and twisted the cloth out of place."

Falcon Flynn nodded.

At that moment he saw some marks on the blotting pad.

They looked like straggling letters, and the next moment all legibility seemed to vanish.

The city sharp had not caught sight of the scrawl.

Falcon moved closer to the table and leaned over the pad.

The pencil which had traced the scrawl had broken and evidently fallen from the writer's hand.

"Did you look at the peculiar wound, Mr. Nox?" asked the detective.

"No. What made it—a bullet?"

"I think not."

Nox coolly bent over the dead man.

It was Falcon Flynn's time.

He looked sharply at the scribble on the pad and made out words of this import:

"The woman killed me. They call her—"

Death had broken off the sentence.

The man, struck with death, must have fallen at the moment of telling the dread truth, for the pencil had cut into the blotter and the point broken off.

Nixon Nox was gazing at the dagger wound and his lips seemed glued together.

The Falcon ran his hand over the scrawl and nearly blotted it out.

He had the words already engraved in his mind and he could reproduce them at any time.

"It was a knife," said Nixon Nox. "It was a death cut—never saw anything like it. But how came this dead detective in my house?"

Falcon Flynn shook his head, wondering if the keen, watchful sharper believed him.

"I will get before the police again," he went on. "I don't like all this notoriety. I had enough of it with that Rolfe case, for you remember that I was unfortunate enough to be with him when he was stricken in the Park."

He went over to a sofa at one side of the room and sat down.

He evidently was greatly disturbed.

The detective, who knew why Tom Haverstraw had entered that house, did not betray his secret.

If the sharp had no knowledge of that second tragedy, Flynn had no need to fear; but if he did know, he was playing a wonderfully cool hand.

"Would you mind waiting here till I summon the proper authorities?" asked the ferret-sport.

"You mean would I care to keep vigil over this corpse? I'd rather not, Mr. Flynn. We can fasten the house so that no one will enter until the authorities come. It is a great puzzle to me—the coming of this man to my house—unless he wanted to bore me with queries about my last ride with Ramon Rolfe. You will find me at the Manhattan when I am wanted. I'm not going to run off; on the contrary, I will do all I can to ferret out the hand that killed your detective friend. You know where the Manhattan is—just around the corner on the next street."

The Manhattan was a place which had a reputation well known to the Falcon, and he already knew that the city sharp was one of its best patrons.

"You can go to the Manhattan, and if wanted we will call for you there."

"You'll want me, I suspect, for the deed was done in my house. See? I'll be there."

The light was lowered a little and the two went out together.

At the corner they separated, the handsome and cool suspect to walk toward the Manhattan, whose brilliantly lighted windows were easily seen at all hours after dark, and the detective to seek the patrolman on that beat.

The policeman was sent to the house, while Falcon called up the proper authorities.

Having done this, he went back toward the house of the crime and looked at it.

But suddenly he turned the corner and was walking toward the Manhattan, whose double doors were ajar.

In the hall he caught sight of two men, and one he at once recognized as Nixon Nox.

"Don't fail to find her and do it without delay," he heard the sharp say as the other man came toward the door.

Falcon drew back to let the stranger pass out without catching sight of him, and presently down the steps he came.

"My old friend, Deuce O'Diamonds!" he exclaimed. "So you found your friend? Well, that's clever. Going off, eh?"

Deuce O'Diamonds pulled his hat-brim over his face, and down the sidewalk he stepped—his gait agile and noiseless.

"Not this time, my good fellow. I remember how you gave me the slip not long ago, but this time I won't be thrown off the scent by the shadow."

The Falcon started after the man.

Half a square away a carriage was seen standing in the shadow of a building, and Deuce O'Diamonds sprang into it.

The vehicle started immediately.

Detective Flynn was discomfited, for no other carriage was in sight and he was unable to follow.

"It's too bad. I'll have to go back to the house and wait for the wagon," he growled, as he retraced his steps.

At the corner he again glanced toward

the Manhattan, and there on the broad steps of the club-house stood the city sharp, complacently smoking one of his prime cigars.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOST IS FOUND.

Meanwhile, Manta Kent, the girl from Jersey, had found a very nice abode with Mother Iron-Hand.

True, the old lady did not belong to the Four Hundred; nor was she interested in the doings of New York society, but she was clever, and this suited Manta.

Mother Iron-Hand had been acquainted with Falcon Flynn for some years and went off into more than one eulogium concerning him to the girl.

It was not long before the old woman got Manta's story from her—how she had come to New York to find Hamish Kent and how she had run across the detective.

But one thing she concealed, and that was the theft of her satchel and the loss of the strange bit of mechanism which she had found in the little workshop at Fernbank.

To all of this Mother Iron-Hand listened with a great deal of curiosity, and at the end of the story she hoped that Hamish would be found.

But she was doubtful.

New York was a large city, and there were many disappearances there.

Perhaps Hamish Kent had fallen into the hands of evil-doers, who had put him out of the way.

It was the evening after Manata's arrival at the house of Mother Iron-Hand, and she stood at the window curiously looking out from the curtains at the tide of humanity that rolled by.

She did not know that she was watched.

Across the street stood a man with dark, keen eyes, who was looking at the face dimly seen between a rift in the curtains.

This person was not the man who had tracked Manta to the house, for that individual was Hylo Jack.

On the contrary, the watcher was better looking than Jack, and he seemed to take great interest in the face at the window.

At last he crossed the street, but did not approach the house.

He was joined by a comrade near the place and the two walked together.

"Did you see the girl?" asked this comrade.

"I saw a face at one of the windows, but could not see it very well."

"'Twas she! I know it. I tracked her to the spot and she's in Mother Iron-Hand's cage yet."

"If I thought so—"

"Shall I prove it?"

"No, I'll believe you. So she's really got to the city and you say she's seen a detective?"

"That's what she's done."

"She's looking for you, don't you think?" the same speaker continued. "Don't you think you'd better change nests?"

"Not yet. I'm satisfied where I am. If I thought she had posted the detective—"

"You may bet your head she's done that, so far as she can. That's what brought her from Jersey. And, what is more, the man she saw is one of the best of 'em."

"Falcon Flynn, you say."

"Yes."

"Where does this man live?"

"Near Broadway."

"That's not very definite. I want something better than that, I do."

"Yes, you want to make a mess of it. Hadn't you better leave it to some one else?"

"Why should I? Don't you think me capable of taking care of this man, if he is one of the best spotters in New York?"

"You may be. By Jove! I've seen some of your work and I guess you can do a little something in your line."

"I wouldn't be here if I couldn't, eh?" laughed the second man, who looked like

a person of fifty, with a bearded face and sharp visage.

"You don't want me to prove that the girl is yonder, in Mother Iron-Hand's house, then?"

"Not now. I'll take your word for it. Come on, then."

The pair walked on and presently entered a little house, over whose door was a tin placard bearing the legend: "John Giles, Stencil Maker."

The sign was quite new.

They went to a small apartment on the second floor, where the elder of the pair unlocked a door and ushered his companion inside.

There were some chairs in the room, a couch in one corner and a work bench covered with small tools.

John Giles threw himself upon one of the chairs and looked over at his companion.

"This isn't Fernbank," he observed, with a smile.

"Not quite. There's some difference between the Jersey mud-hole and Gotham."

Both laughed a little.

"I wonder what she would say if she could look in here and see me. I've been missing three months, and here I am, hidden still. I go out, but I am careful, and the detective will have to look a long time before he finds out that John Giles, stencil maker, is Hamish Kent, of Fernbank."

"He's a shrewd one," averred the other, who was our old acquaintance, Hylo Jack.

"No doubt of it. I believe I have heard of some of his work. I know, at least, that the name sounds familiar. Falcon Flynn."

"He's the most wonderful man to pick up clues, so they say," assured Jack. "Finds them nearly where they don't exist, and he generally gets what he starts after."

"But," with a shrug of the shoulders, "he don't get me."

"See that he doesn't!"

Hamish Kent leaned toward the work bench and pulled open a drawer in it.

In another moment he had fished out an uncompleted bit of work, many little wheels and pinions, which he handed to his friend Jack.

"I wouldn't know what to call it if I were to be hanged for not telling," said the swindler, looking up with a grin.

"It's all Greek to me."

Hamish Kent took the mechanism back and wound it up.

It went off with a little ticking, like the works of a watch; but suddenly there was a hissing sound and the machinery stopped.

"It's broke!" inferred Jack.

The inventor threw it back into the drawer, which he closed and locked.

"It's all right," said he. "What I make never breaks. I've made good work my life study, and you can depend on what I turn out. But there's the girl. Looking for me in New York? It's funny, and I can't help thinking about it."

"See that she don't find you, for you know what that might do."

Hamish Kent started visibly, but did not speak.

"Who is Mother Iron-Hand, anyway?" he suddenly asked.

"She's a woman who knows a good deal, if she don't run in society."

"How came Manta to go to her?"

"The detective sent her there."

"Jehosaphat! Sent her there, did he? Then he must know Mother Iron-Hand."

"He does. She's helped him in more than one case, and I fancy that Manta, as you call her, isn't the first fair boarder he's sent the old woman."

"Where did Mother Iron-Hand come from?"

"I can't tell you, as she never handed me the incidents of her life. She once dropped in upon us at the rooms of the Eureka, but we didn't let her invest."

"Why not?"

"That would have given her a chance to get at our manner of doing business, and we don't care to have spies on our books."

"That's right; no spies, no exposures."

Hamish Kent rose and walked over to a curtain which concealed one of the corners of the room.

He pulled it aside and came back with a bottle and two little glasses.

These he placed on the work bench, and, filling the glasses, he pushed one toward Hylo Jack, whose hand eagerly clasped it.

"Would you mind doing me a favor?" he asked, as Jack raised his glass.

"Not at all, seeing that we're in it together. What do you want done?"

"I want to see Stella."

"Stella Starr, eh?"

"Of course; there is but one Stella."

"And I thank Heaven that she's but one. And you want her, do you?"

"Yes."

"But you don't want her to come here?"

"It won't be safe for me to see her elsewhere. Will you tell her, Jack?"

"I'll do it," and the glass was emptied.

"I'll wait here."

"Oh, you want her right off, do you?"

"As soon as she can come."

Hylo Jack helped himself once more to the wine, and then put on his hat.

"Wait; take her this," and Kent tossed the man a bit of paper, upon which he had hastily scribbled some pencil marks.

"Don't lose it."

"I'd sooner lose my head," and thrusting the paper into his pocket, Jack left the work shop.

He flitted down the street, keeping, as was his wont, in the shadows of the houses, and at length turned into a well-to-do thoroughfare and made his way to one of the best houses in a certain block.

He was in a respectable part of the city, where everything was clean and showed evidences of thrift.

The bell which he rang was promptly answered, and the moment the door opened wide enough to admit him he slipped in and faced the woman who stood in the hall.

She was garmented in black and her face showed signs of eagerness as she waited for Hylo Jack to speak.

"Here," said the man, running his hand into his pocket after the note. "He wants you, I guess, Stella."

She took the scrawl and leaned toward the chandelier, reading it silently.

"Is the man a fool?" cried she, looking up at him. "Does he want the tigers of the trail down upon him?"

"Can't say; but he wants to see you."

"At the new retreat, he says."

"There's where I left him."

"And, pray, how do you know you were not tracked by some detective?" quizzed Stella, whose eyes flashed while she spoke.

"I'm always careful."

"And so are they."

"But let them get ahead of Hylo Jack if they can!" he exclaimed. "They haven't done so yet."

Stella laughed a little, and looked at the note again.

"Will he be sure to be alone?" she asked.

"You can bank on that."

She shook her head doubtfully, and then said:

"I may go. He wants to see me badly, he says."

"Bout the girl at Mother Iron-Hand's, I guess."

"She's there yet, is she?"

"Yes."

"Jack?"

"Stella?"

"Do you know anything about the interior of Mother Iron-Hand's house?"

Hylo Jack looked silently at Stella for a moment.

"I've been there," he answered.

"Then tell me what it is like inside, Jack. Give me the location of all the rooms."

CHAPTER X.

A COOLHEAD'S GAME.

Something about this woman called Stella seemed to fascinate Hylo Jack; he could not resist the demand.

He gave her an idea of the inside of Mother Iron-Hand's house by drawing a plan of it roughly on a piece of paper, and pushing it toward her.

She thanked him for it.

"What had I better do?" queried Jack to himself when he found that the house was behind him. "She wanted that for a purpose. She was so eager to know where the girl from Jersey was that I'm afraid—"

"You are, are you?"

Hyla Jack turned and found the burning eyes of Stella fixed upon him.

She had stolen upon him so noiselessly that he was not aware of her presence, and for half a second he stood like a block, feeling an indescribable chill running up and down his spine.

"I was a-saying that I'm afraid the girl from Jersey will get tired of being shut up in Mother Iron-Hand's house," he said, thinking that he had thrown Stella off her guard, and was glad when she turned the first corner and vanished, evidently on her way to Hamish Kent's.

During these scenes, the city sharp, in one of the retired rooms of the Manhattan, was complacently smoking one of his favorite cigars, while the voices of other frequenters of the club came to him from the adjoining billiard room.

He was not called back to his house by the authorities, and must have wondered if the corpse of Tom Haverstraw, the detective, had been removed.

Several hours passed before he left the club-house, and then he walked home.

Yes, the body was gone.

By the dim light in the parlor the same dark stains were to be seen on the wall and carpet, and he sat down at the table.

His face was strangely white and tensely drawn.

He was alone, too, and this seemed to terrorize him.

The man, whether a murderer or not, was unnerved.

No one came in.

At last, throwing the stump of the fourth cigar into the nearest spittoon, he sprang up.

"I'll do it! I'll see her myself! Maybe Jack didn't deliver the message. She'll see me, too!"

And out he went.

The moment he passed from the house a man was upon his track.

This person had been waiting for some one to emerge from the place, and now he seemed to be satisfied.

Nixon Nox did not take a cab, but walked rapidly from the vicinity.

Once he glanced at his watch, but not until he had covered a long distance and found himself in the street where stood the Rolfe mansion.

It was the best known house on the broad thoroughfare, and he did not hesitate to run up the well-worn steps.

What did he care if the hour was late?

His ring was answered, after a brief interval, and the door opened, to show him the face and figure of a young girl.

It was Reva Rolfe.

She looked searchingly at the sharp a moment, as if to fathom the meaning of his late call, but the task seemed too much for her.

Escorting him to the parlor, which was lighted, she turned upon him with inquiring gaze.

"You will pardon me, I hope," said he, with some familiarity, as he plumped into one of the heavily-cushioned chairs. "It is late for a call, I know, but I felt that I must see you."

"My friends are always welcome, no matter when they come," replied the fair girl, whose face, very white, still showed traces of the excitement through which she had passed.

Her friends!

Did she hold him in that catalogue?

"I am still annoyed not a little by the reporters," continued the caller. "They seem to like to get at the details of that grewsome ride of mine."

"It is just like them. They will be writing about that tragical death for months to come."

"Unless the other one stops them."

"The other one, you say?"

"Ah, yes. I have come to anticipate the newspapers. I am an actor in another tragedy, darker than the one which is connected with your father's name."

Reva, all eagerness, watched him narrowly, her face bent forward and her arms on the sides of the chair.

"It is real murder this time, and seems to have taken place in my house."

"In your house?"

"Yes. A detective who must have come there for a purpose was found dead in my main parlor."

"Merciful heavens! This is terrible."

"And intensely exciting. I never had such a shock before."

"You've been there since?"

"I came from home but a few minutes ago, consequently my nerves are still a little out of tune."

"I don't wonder. But, the dead man and the motive of the assassin?"

"The one is known; the other is not."

"Terrible!"

"The man was found lying on my floor stabbed to death, and the body, ere this, is in the hands of the authorities."

"And you? Have you been summoned to tell what you know about the crime?"

"Not yet; but they will want me, I suspect. It is more undesirable notoriety. I was not at home when the crime took place. I came home to find that it was over."

"But the call of the detective to your house? He could not have been decoyed thither?"

"It is all mystery," averred Nixon, with a wave of the hand. "I am as much in the dark as the police will probably be."

Reva was silent for a little while.

"But, let us turn aside from such things. We have had enough tragedies within the past few weeks. I regret now that I unstrung your nerves with my story, but the papers will give a one-sided account of it in the morning, so I thought best to forestall them with the truth as I know it."

"Will they call in Doctor Julius?" asked Reva, suddenly.

"I can't say. The police department has surgeons of its own, and some of them will probably look after this matter."

"Doctor Julius is our family physician, and it was he who was closeted half an hour with father's body after he was brought home."

"I had not heard of this before. But he discovered nothing that disputes the verdict the coroner rendered?"

"I think not. But he has changed much since that time."

"How changed, Miss Reva?"

"He has lost color—color and flesh. You haven't seen him, perhaps."

"I own that I have not had occasion to consult Doctor Julius Stemway. I shall be sorry, however, if you lose the services of your family doctor."

"I shall lose him. I feel it!" cried Reva. "The man is nearing death."

Nixon Nox did not speak for half a minute, during which time his gaze wandered to the rich paintings on the wall; then he turned to the beautiful girl who confronted him.

"I must go," said he. "You will be prepared for the newspapers' story of the finding of Tom Haverstraw, detective, dead in my room. We may see the mystery cleared up."

He stood before Reva, who regarded him from the depths of her chair, saying nothing while she gazed.

When she rose she seemed to draw her figure proudly up, and her hand fell like a snowflake upon his sleeve.

"I have never asked you, Mr. Nox, and after what you have said about the reporters annoying you, you will pardon me for what I am about to say."

"You are always pardoned in advance."

Her eyes brightened.

"You were with him in his last moments. You were his companion on that last and fatal ride in the Park."

"It was my never-to-be-forgotten ill-fortune."

"Yes; no doubt you regret it. But, tell me: Did you see any one run from the spot after he fell back dead?"

She had come so close to him that her white face seemed to touch his, and she held her breath while she waited for his reply.

"You will tell me, won't you?" she went on. "I believe you said that you might have seen some one flit out of sight just as he fell. Didn't you see some one?"

Nixon Nox looked down at her, and his face seemed to get a faint smile.

"Truth to tell, miss, there is one thing I have kept from you and the police. You intimate that Ramon Rolfe may have been murdered?"

"I believe he was murdered!" said the girl through welded lips.

"I thought so. Did I see any one flit out of sight as he fell? To answer that, I might wrong the innocent."

"The truth can harm no one."

"I thought I saw a man leave the spot just as your father fell back into the carriage. There were shadows in the Park at the time, you know, for we had delayed our ride until after dark. I may have been mistaken."

"But don't you believe you really saw a man run from the spot? There are bushes there."

"You know that, then?"

"I do. I have seen them."

"I don't doubt it, for you are a determined young lady and you desire to have this mystery cleared up."

"It shall be cleared up if it takes every penny he left behind! I have been there several times since. I have not trusted the detectives. I don't believe a word of the coroner's verdict, and I'll tell you why I don't."

Reva Rolfe, turning to the table, drew toward her a little black velvet covered box.

"Somebody lost something there that night," she went on, opening the box. "I have kept it to myself until this moment. I found it at the end of one of the iron settees that dot the Park in that particular part of the driveway."

The city sharp was wondering what she had found, when she opened the box and put her hand in it.

"You saw a man run from the spot, did you?" she repeated. "This is the one thing you kept from the police—"

"For the sake of your nerves, Miss Reva."

A peculiar smile came to her lips.

"If that man killed him he must have left his sweetheart's ring behind."

Her hand had come out, and in it lay a ring which Nixon Nox looked at with renewed interest.

"This would be a clew in the hands of some shrewd detective. This might be enough to hang somebody, if—"

She paused, and did not finish the sentence.

"What do you think of it? See, it's a lady's ring. Notice the delicate work on the circlet, and if you had a magnifying glass you would see the letters 'Bella' underneath the setting."

Nox held out his hand for the ring, but it was quickly withdrawn.

"Pardon me," said Reva Rolfe. "I will not part with it until I have placed it in the hands of the best clew-finder in New York. This I have decided to do. I made up my mind to-night. I have selected my man, and he will see this ring to-morrow."

"Make no mistake. Don't hang the innocent, miss," urged the caller.

"The innocent are safe. The guilty shall suffer. Good-night!"

CHAPTER XI.

A TRAP FOR A WARY BIRD.

Nixon Nox, the city sharp, walked from Reva Rolfe's home with a countenance that was a study.

"She's determined, I can see that," he muttered. "She will have a ferret on the trail by morning, but one is there already—the man who found Tom Haverstraw dead in my house. This will give me more trouble, just as if I haven't had enough with this thing. Where are Deuce O'Diamonds and Hyla Jack?"

He bent his steps toward the home of the Eureka and entered with a latch-key.

Nixon Nox was but seldom seen there.

The main manipulator of the swindle

kept aloof from the field where the dupes were plucked, but, sitting back in the luxurious parlors of his own quarters, he could take in the cash, and out of it pay his confederates for their services.

Now he had come to the swindling ground in person, and, though the hour was late, he found his tools at home.

Nox's appearance to Hylo Jack and Deuce O'Diamonds, who were having a quiet game of cards in the main office of the Eureka, startled them not a little.

The cards fell from their hands, and they stared blankly at their master.

Deuce O'Diamonds was the first to speak.

"What's the rumpus now, cap'n?" asked he.

The city sharp came forward and dropped into the chair which Jack had vacated.

"There's a good deal to pay. I'm in a mix again."

"In a mix? Will it hurt the business of the Eureka?"

"Not much, I think, for you two take care of that. How's business?"

"Fairly good. Sold twenty shares in the New Eldorado. Looks like they'll go off very well. Give 'em time, I say. The fools will come, eh, Jack?"

Hylo Jack nodded and laughed, and the face of Deuce O'Diamonds suddenly assumed a sober expression.

"There's been a little blood shed in my house."

"Not in yours, cap'n?"

"In mine. The papers will tell about it in the morning, but I want you to hear of it now."

"Who's cut?"

"Tom Haverstraw, a detective."

The two sharpers exchanged glances.

"Who did it? You, in self-defense?"

"I don't know who touched him. He was killed with a dagger by some one as yet unknown to the police."

"The police have it in hand, have they?"

"Yes."

Deuce O'Diamonds leaned back in his chair and his hands toyed with the relinquished cards.

"It's a bad bit o' business," he averred. "Killed in your house—a detective! Tom Haverstraw! Maybe he wanted to know something about the Eureka?"

"But they don't suspect that I'm into it."

"There's no telling what these fellows suspect."

"That's true."

"I want you to help me a little."

"We'll do that, cap'n."

Nox took a long breath.

"In the first place, I'm out of town to all callers."

"Yes?"

"Secondly, I'm not at the head of the Eureka, no matter what they find out."

"We'll swear you out o' that. It can be done, and we'll see that you're not at the head of the institution."

"Thirdly, I want you to decoy somebody for me."

"We'll do that, too," chimed in both men, but Jack's assent was not very promptly given.

Nixon leaned toward the table and rested one of his hands on the edge.

"There is a man who will give me a little trouble if his plans are not nipped in the bud."

"The detective?"

"Just so. This man will try to connect me with the tragedy in my house, and I can't afford to be so connected, though I am innocent—as innocent as the child unborn."

"Of course you are. Who ever thought of you cutting a man to death?"

"This man is cool and ambitious," continued Nixon, not heeding the last remarks. "He wants promotion and money. He will throw around me a net which will give me trouble, for circumstances may be made to appear against me."

"I see now," said Deuce O'Diamonds. "This man—this ferret, was found dead in your house. No one saw the murder. The detective comes and finds the body. You probably are not at home, and there may be blood on the walls and even on some of your clothing."

"My God! Man, you don't intend to insinuate—"

Deuce O'Diamonds put forth his hand deprecatingly.

"Wouldn't do that for the world, cap'n. I'm just illustrating what this shrewd detective might try to do. He sha'n't do it!"

"They have a grudge against me, these fellows have. It extends back a little farther than the birth of the Eureka. They want to get even with me."

"But they sha'n't, I say, cap'n."

"That's just what I want attended to," declared Nox. "This man who found the dead body of Tom Haverstraw is one of my enemies. They call him Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective."

Hylo Jack started.

"I know him. He's as keen as a mink, and never lets up till he reaches the end of the game."

"They tell me so, and I believe it, from what I know of the man."

"I don't like him."

"He'll be after the Eureka next."

"That he will; then where would our harvest be?"

"It would be cut before it got ripe."

"Exactly. We must see that it isn't cut."

"No human hand shall harvest it green!" cried Deuce O'Diamonds, and his hand descended upon the table with an emphasis which he still further emphasized with an imprecation.

"You're sure we're alone, boys?"

"We never have eavesdroppers at the Eureka."

"I thought not. See here; I want you to have this detective come here."

"Here, cap'n?"

"Right here—to this house."

"Well?"

"Having got him in the trap—"

The city sharp paused, as if he feared to go on.

"After we've got him here what is to be done?"

"You ought to know. I want this man removed from doing us any harm."

Tom Haverstraw's friend and fellow-ferret was in the shadow.

"You don't expect us to kill the man?" blurted Hylo Jack.

"I have said nothing about killing any one," answered Nixon, with a swift glance at Deuce O'Diamonds.

"I can't go that far for any person."

"You can't, eh? Suppose Hardin Hawley had waked up while you were in his room."

The man addressed seemed to wince.

"I might have scampered," said Jack, averting his face a moment.

"You would have done more than that. You would have turned on him like a tiger, and you know it. Come, Jack, you are not the thin-skinned man you let on to be."

"Maybe not, but I don't like to kill any one."

"Pish! You don't want the detective to break up the golden nest, do you?"

"I might find another."

"Where? In this city, after he has spoiled this one? You don't mean to tell me that you can find another thing that pays as well for as little labor as the Eureka does."

Hylo Jack did not reply, but looked over at his companion.

"The detective must come here not later than to-morrow afternoon," resumed the sharp.

"Will you be here?"

"No, I will not be here. He will come and—remain."

"It will take a little work."

"You can make the trap, Deuce. Put a sign on the door, yonder, saying that the Eureka is shut up for a few hours."

"Yes, we might do that."

"It is the only way I see. If this hound is not thrown from the trail now the company dissolves under tragic circumstances."

"What of Stella?"

"Never mind Stella," said Nixon. "She's all right and will play her part of the game without a break."

Deuce O'Diamonds got up and measured off a square space in the floor where his chair had been.

"The old pit is under there, isn't it?" asked Nox.

"Right under the chair."

"There's where you want to hinge your trap door. You can make all the arrangements and at the proper time Jack can decoy him here."

Hylo Jack set his lips hard.

It was a game he did not relish, but he was not in a position to protest.

"It shall be done. We might send him a hint that the Eureka might throw a little light on the mystery that was born in your house."

"But be careful how you do it. Don't put anything upon paper. Don't make a balk of it."

"Trust us for that."

"See that the trap works easily. See that there is no aftermath, boys."

Nox left his chair, and, his elegant figure and pale face were seen in the light of the jets burning over the table.

He threw a searching look around the room and then walked toward the door.

Deuce O'Diamonds was about to speak to him when Jack's hand touched his arm and he signaled him to let the chief depart without being detained.

The city sharp bade his tools good-night and passed from the house.

For a moment the two men left behind looked at each other without a word.

"Shall we, Deuce?" asked Hylo Jack.

"It'd be feathering our nest."

"And tightening a rope around our necks, maybe."

There were no scruples with Deuce O'Diamonds.

"Pish! It can't be! What if he gets the hint without any one knowing it but us? What if he comes down here on an investigating tour with no one knowing where he's going? Don't you see how it will work? And the hold we'll have on the cap'n!"

"And the one he'll have on us!"

"You refuse?" questioned Deuce O'Diamonds, his brow suddenly darkening.

"You refuse to sow this harvest of gold? You don't want to have all the money one can spend, and for a little work? Why, it's better than ten Eureka's!"

"If we succeed, yes. If we fail, it's not as good as the tail end of one."

"But if we put our heads together there can't be any failure. This man-rat of the city is our enemy, too. How soon would he shut the doors of the Eureka if he suspected that we were here. It's self-defense, Jack. It's a fight for life; nothing less!"

There was no answer.

"We'll carry out the plans to the letter, and there need be no red on your hands—not a drop! I'll pull the cord; you simply be the decoy. It's this or death. It's obey the cap'n or work for a living, and for one I don't intend to work!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE.

Thus the trap was set.

Would the man-rat, as they had termed him, enter?

Would the shrewd Falcon Flynn come to the death trigger and end his tramp after the guilty as Tom Haverstraw had ended his?

The night waned and a new day came.

Haverstraw's death startled the city.

The newspapers gave highly colored accounts of it and the police looked at one another in mute inquiry from the superintendent to the humblest patrolman.

It was the beginning, all thought, of a new puzzle.

"What did the city sharp know?—anything?"

The man had been found dead in his house.

Of course he would come forward with all he knew about it and might be able to enlighten the clew seekers.

He came forward without being sent for.

Bright and early the day after the crime, he presented himself in Mulberry Street and asked that he be permitted to tell all he knew.

It was not much, but he was anxious to tell it.

He appeared at his ease, with his handsome face sleekly shaved and his clothes the best the tailor could produce.

The Falcon was not present when he called, and he was fortunate enough to meet the chief inspector.

Nox was cool and collected.

He was permitted to tell his story without being interrupted and told it impressively.

He talked like one who had nothing to conceal and everything to make clear in the interest of justice.

His story was taken down for future reference and he departed, after lighting one of his highly perfumed cigars.

He went back home, stopping at the Manhattan a moment to see if any mail had been left there for him.

There was one letter and he slipped it into his pocket after glancing at the superscription.

This letter he opened upon his arrival home.

A glance down the sheet at the signature caused him to start and he looked up with a white face.

"I'll see about this," he muttered.

The sharp changed his clothes and left the house.

He turned up, though the hour was early for a call, in a well-known part of the city and rang a doorbell.

The door opened almost before the silvery notes of the bell had ceased to echo.

The woman in black—dressed that way still—stood before him.

"You got my note, did you?" she asked, as she turned upon him after having conducted him to the parlor.

"I came the moment after reading it."

"What have you done?"

She was standing before him with her piercing eyes riveted upon his face, and her whole form in a thrill of half-suppressed excitement.

"What have I done? What do you mean?"

Stella looked at him a while longer.

"You've turned traitor."

"I have not. Woman, you are ever jealous, and you can't let your honest good sense have full swing."

"You have told the police."

"I had to say something to keep the hounds away from me."

"You have tried to put them after me!"

"After you? The last thing I would do, and you know it!"

He was standing, but she waved him to a chair.

"I know what you have done. You have been to the police with the story of what you thought you knew. Do you think they believed you?"

"I can't say, but I told the truth. I didn't kill Tom Haverstraw, the police ferret. I know that."

"So do I. But why did you go and tell them?"

"I thought it was best."

"It will have to stand, now."

She crossed the room; then came back to the table, her hands clinched and her face tensely drawn and colorless. "I suppose you thought you were doing right. But you weren't."

"That is your notion."

She made no reply, but her face flushed.

"I played a little hand myself, a while ago," she went on.

"This morning?"

"Yes, you may call it morning, though it was not very light."

"What did you do?"

"I went over his accounts, as he left them."

"Where?"

"In his house."

"You don't mean to tell me, woman, that you have been to Ramon Rolfe's house?"

"Why not?" she laughed. "Haven't I a right to go where I please?"

"But that was dangerous ground!"

"Whom was I liable to see there but the girl? But she didn't show herself."

"Still, if you had been seen by the police or the professional shadowers, what then?"

"But I wasn't seen!" she broke in. "I went like a thief in the night. I was suc-

cessful. I know what he was worth at the time of his death. It exceeded my expectations."

"Indeed?"

"He was a man methodical in business matters. He knew to a penny what he was worth every day."

"I would have told you as much if you had asked me."

"But that wouldn't have been proof," was the quick response. "I wanted to see for myself."

"You didn't disturb anything in the house that could possibly give rise to suspicion?"

"I didn't go there for that purpose. I opened the little steel safe in the corner of the library—"

"Opened it?" echoed Nox. "How could you?"

"Never mind that. Don't you know we have an ally who can do anything?"

"Hamish? Yes; he is wonderful. And he told you how to pass the doors of steel, eh?"

Stella nodded.

"Well, what did you find there?"

"Just exactly what I was after. I found his accounts balanced the day before he rode in the Park."

Well,

"A million and a half, lacking ten dollars."

"Pretty well fixed."

"I should say so."

"Not all in money."

"No. A great deal of it in bonds and some in city property; but all as good as gold."

"He would have nothing less. I knew the man."

"I took my time," smiled Stella, as her figure seemed to increase in stature. "I had a long stay before me, and I didn't expect to be disturbed."

"Go on. You found something besides the schedule, didn't you?"

"I did—some odd things. Among others I found a sheet of paper upon which seemed to have been drawn the plan of a summer house. Indeed, it was labeled so."

"What of that? He was something of a lover of neat buildings. I could have told you that."

"But there was a memorandum beneath the little plan. It ran like this: 'June 12th, 1864.' Is that 'Greek' to you?"

"Not quite. If you look at it in a certain light it would seem to indicate an important date. He was out of the city that year."

"True. He was on the battlefields of Virginia, June 12th, 1864."

"Wait! How old would she be, if living?"

"You can answer that question," returned the woman. "Count from that date till now."

The city sharp seemed to do so mentally.

"Is Reva that old?"

"Yes."

"But Reva is not his child. He did not say so."

"True; but there is no proof that she is not."

"There is proof, and I possess it."

"You?"

"I have it—here," and the city sharp touched his left breast. "I, too, have been at work. I can prove that she is not his child."

"But you must not."

"The million and a half vanishes if we do, eh?"

"Exactly. You must not forget that this is a game for a fortune. We have the cards in our hands now. Reva must be proved his child."

"Then I will tear up my proofs."

"Not yet. Hold them a little longer. He is out of the way. Ramon Rolfe cannot step in between us and victory. That is settled. When did you see her?"

"Last night."

"And told her—"

"I told her nothing. Time enough for that. What will Hamish do when we disclose our hand?"

"What can he do but acquiesce?"

"I know he is ours."

"He and his wonderful inventions. They are deadlier than the darts of old Italy. They defy the best surgeons in the land. They defy them all."

"Hamish Kent must not know that his child is in the city."

"He will not."

"Not if the girl is watched and attended to. She is at Mother Iron-Hand's."

"I know that."

"And this woman—this Mother Iron-Hand—is the spy of one of the trail dogs."

"I know that, too."

"Then I seem to have no secrets at all," smiled Stella. "I know the past history of Mother Iron-Hand. It's not very creditable."

"But you don't want to tell the old woman so," warned Nixon.

"Not if I stand within reach of her vise-like hands. I know what they can do."

"Then steer clear of them. Don't affront her. She has talons like an eagle."

"Now you know just what to do. Make love to Reva Rolfe, and do it at once. You have everything in your hands. That lovemaking must be a success. You must marry her between now and next week."

He did not speak.

"You must know, knowing what you do, that she has a friend, Hardin Hawley."

"The man who lost the proofs," thought Nixon.

"That man is in love with Reva, and the affection is returned. But we can beat him. There is a club which I can hold over the head of the girl if she becomes stubborn. It is a club that can floor a giant."

"What is it?"

Stella came close to Nixon Nox and looked him in the face.

"Hawley is really Ramon's brother!" said she, slowly, and with emphasis.

"Woman, you must be in league with Satan!" cried Nixon, recoiling a pace.

"Not quite; but I have facilities for finding out things," was the answer. "It is true; but, remember, nothing of this secret till we must use it. It is the last resort. It would stun both of them."

The city sharp looked at the white-faced woman with mute admiration.

"Now go back. I have seen and told you enough. Don't play into the hands of the police. Don't endanger the stakes. Hamish Kent shall not see the girl from Jersey, and Falcon Flynn shall find his best clew valueless. You can smoke one of your best Havanas over that, Nixon," and the woman turned with her triumphant gaze toward the window.

"Gods! what a creature!" thought the city sharp.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER THE GLASS.

The Flash Detective of Gotham sat in his little quarters near Broadway.

He had been there some time and was entirely alone.

Falcon Flynn was in a busy mood, which meant that he was ruminating mentally at work on some deep problem connected with the Ramon Rolfe mystery.

He heard some one approach his door, and then the footsteps receded.

As there was no rapping, he watched the portal a moment and then crossed the room to it.

It was unlocked and he opened it to see no one.

But a letter lay on the floor at the door.

The detective picked it up and found that it was enclosed in an envelope which had once been white.

Carrying it back to the table, he opened it and sat down again.

It read as follows, and the handwriting was a little crude and evidently disguised.

"Mr. Falcon Flynn—If you will visit the rooms of the Eureka Investment Company, within an hour you will learn something to your advantage in the present case. Don't delay, but be discreet and keep your wits about you. You might pretend to want to take a little stock in the New Eldorado. Anything to get ahead of the hounds, you know.

"ONE WHO KNOWS."

The detective read the letter several times, or as often as it promised to get new importance.

He did not know what work it had taken two rascals to properly word that communication.

He did not know how Hylo Jack and Deuce O'Diamonds had put their heads together to concoct a letter that would deceive him and draw him into the trap which Nixon Nox had planned.

At last he threw the letter down and leaned back in his chair with his eyes fixed upon it.

It looked to him very like a trap.

There was something about the wording which suggested a good deal of eagerness on the part of the writer, and the ferret-sport could not think otherwise.

Still, as a part of a plot, it was interesting and might prove valuable.

He picked it up and thrust it into his pocket.

Ten minutes later he was on the street.

"Why not drop in upon the doctor?" said he to himself, as he came alongside of Doctor Julius's house.

He had not seen the surgeon and chemist since their startling interview, when he was shown the steel needle subsequently taken away by the woman in black.

The Falcon entered the office and saw the card which told him that Doctor Stenway was up-stairs in the laboratory.

This time he did not go up, but pulled the bell-cord three times and sat down to wait for the doctor.

Presently there were footsteps on the stairway and the door opened.

Doctor Julius had changed.

He no longer had the bright, searching look which had given to his face a remarkable appearance.

His skin was now parchment-like and his face cadaverous.

Moreover, his eyes were deeply sunken, and seemed to emit a strange, unnatural light.

Doctor Julius was failing.

He started a little when his gaze fell upon the detective, and seemed to recall their last interview.

"You are at work. I know it!" he exclaimed. "You have no regard for my health. But, go ahead. You can't cheat me out of much life. I am almost there."

His voice had a singular tone, and the detective had to look at him while he talked.

"I told you, doctor, you remember, that I could not turn from justice, no matter what might happen."

"It's all right, I say. You are stalking her. You are after the woman in black."

"She holds a secret."

Doctor Julius made no reply, but his gaze wandered across the office, and rested on a shelf of medical books.

"I can't remember things like I used to," he said, with a faint smile, which soon vanished. "I am forgetful of late. When were you here last?"

Falcon named the date.

"Oh, yes, it was the night she came to see me."

"The night you gave her the steel needle."

"Did I? Did I really give her the little dart?"

"You certainly did. You remember what a demand she made for it?"

"Yes, yes. And I gave it up? No, no! You must be mistaken, Mr. Flynn."

"You might look and see if I am."

"Come! We will go up together."

Doctor Julius, with tottering tread, led the way to the laboratory and shut the door carefully behind them.

He turned on the light in the little room and pulled into it the little box from which the detective had seen him take the deadly needle.

His face was seen to wince as he leaned over and looked into the box.

"It is gone," he said. "Did you see me give it to her?"

"I could not see you, but I am convinced that she went off with it."

"What a fool I am! But how could I refuse?"

"You did not refuse. I am sure of that."

The detective was watching the agitated doctor like a hawk, and all at once Doctor Julius came forward with a quick, nervous step.

"Wait! I'll give you the whole story," he cried, looking wildly around the room. "I'll tell you everything, and you shall tell me what you think of it."

He sat down, somewhat composed, but the following moment he was on his feet again.

"I cannot—I dare not! I am in the toils! I've been caught by that terrible drag-net which is worse than an octopus. I'm in the hands, the tentacles rather, of a devilish that spares nothing. I can't unseal my lips."

Falcon Flynn waited a while for his agitation to subside, but as it did not abate much he said calmly:

"You will be protected."

"Against the cabal? You can't protect against that, I don't care how strong you men are. I haven't looked at myself in the mirror, but I feel the decline. I feel the change that is working in me, and I know that, ere long, strangers will be looking around this room and wondering what Doctor Julius did here."

He ended with a laugh.

"The man is going mad," thought the Falcon.

"But you don't want them to succeed?" he suggested. "Don't you know that a hand may come between, and—"

"Nonsense!" cried the chemist. "Come between, you say? Impossible!"

"But with this woman behind the bars—"

"You must not go that far. You must not lay hands on her to drag her there. That means the end of Doctor Julius."

"She has you in her grip, I see."

"Like the devilish catches its victim and holds him to the end, whether you kill the fish or not. Ha, ha, ha!"

It almost sent the cold chills over the detective to hear that laugh.

"If she should use the needle—"

"Don't! You've said enough, man! See here. The black box is empty. The needle used to be kept here—"

"The one which killed Ramon Rolfe? What do you say to going before the authorities and telling how you found that little bit of steel embedded in his heart?"

Doctor Julius uttered a terrible cry, which for a moment, drove all sallowness from his face, and his hands dropped to his sides.

"Death first! Whatever comes, I am not to be made a witness of," he declared. "You can't use me, remember that!"

"Not for the purpose of convicting the guilty?"

"Not even for that purpose."

The Falcon looked at the speaker, and for a moment tried to read his thoughts.

"I will not go further. I will not ask what this hold is which the woman in black has on you. I will let it go."

"Thanks. I am the most wretched man in existence. I dare not unseal my lips. They must remain closed forever and that is a long time, you know."

"Others must tell the truth."

"They may, but I don't think you can make them."

"Other steel needles may find human hearts."

"My God! that is terribly true. Others may feel the little shaft in their hearts and the doctors will tell the world that they died of heart failure. We doctors tell a good many stories which the world gulps down without a question. What! Are you going?"

"In a moment," and Falcon Flynn drew from his pocket the letter he had just received.

"You are said to be an expert with handwriting," he remarked, as he opened it.

"I used to make it a study. I used to analyze inks as I found their traces on letters, but I'm a little rusty in that branch of science just now."

"But would you mind looking—just glancing at this?" and the crook stalker pushed the letter toward the doctor-chemist.

Doctor Julius adjusted his glasses and took the sheet.

He leaned toward the light and held it close to his face for some time.

After a while he pulled a magnifying glass from a shelf and examined the writing by it.

Not till then did he seem to pay any attention to the contents of the missive.

He read it through.

"Would you mind having me make a little test?" he asked, looking up.

"Not at all. You are at liberty, doctor, to make any test you please."

"I will try and discover the writer."

The doctor-chemist now threw himself into the spirit of the work before him.

He wheeled his examining chair up to the work bench and began.

The detective moved closer and watched him.

A clear volatile fluid was poured over the sheet, and the doctor watched it as it spread.

"I thought so," he said, looking up at the breathless detective. "One of the swindlers wrote that letter."

"One of the sharpers?"

"The ink is the same, and the formation of the letters is identical with them."

"With others you have seen, eh?"

"Yes."

The doctor-chemist unlocked a little drawer and pulled out a folded document.

"They've drawn me into the net with hundreds of others," he went on. "Here is my certificate for fifty shares in the New Eldorado, taken in the office of the company and signed by the sleek-faced fellow as general agent. Look at the formation of the letters in my stock-certificate and those in your letter. And take the glass and examine the two inks. Identical! Don't you think so?"

The Falcon looked a little while, and then turned his face toward Doctor Julius.

"The resemblance is remarkable. What do you think it means?"

"Simply this: The same hand that filled my certificate wrote that letter. Why should they want to tell you anything? Think of it, Mr. Flynn. You are a detective. These men want you to come to their office—to their trap!"

Flynn smiled.

"You are very clever, doctor," said he. "If I go to the office of the Eureka it shall be forewarned."

And he had determined to go thither, and that immediately.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BUTTON IN THE FLOOR.

The spiders sat in the web waiting for the fly, and that fly was to be Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective.

Already on his way thither from the home of Doctor Julius, the detective was walking rapidly, as if eager to have his new adventure out as soon as possible.

The discoveries made by comparing the writing on the decoy letter and the stock certificate had convinced him.

In fact, he was not hard to convince, for he more than half believed from the first that the letter had come from the enemy.

Falcon Flynn was not long turning up in the vicinity of the web.

At that moment the real spider was far from the spot.

Nixon Nox might have been smoking at the Manhattan, or he might have been enjoying one of his perfumed cigars at home—it made no difference.

The trap had been set and the game invited to enter it.

Deuce O'Diamonds was alone.

The smooth-faced rascal—the man who manipulated the bogus stocks, sat in the little chamber which we have entered before now and the room looked as it had looked on previous occasions.

But a vital change had been made.

There was a trap underneath a chair which the swindler had placed purposely in a certain place.

Both he and Hylo Jack had tested the trap and it worked like a charm.

All that was needed to spring the dead-fall was the mere pressing of a button deftly set in the floor underneath the carpet, and already Deuce O'Diamond's foot rested near the spot.

A footstep came up the stairs and thence toward the door.

It stopped there and Deuce O'Diamonds cast a hurried glance toward the floor.

"It's all O. K.," said he, under his breath. "All I have to do is to press the button, when down you go!"

Some one knocked, and the cool scoundrel said "Come in" in a most insinuating manner.

The door opened and before the spider stood the fly.

The decoy letter had worked to a demonstration.

Falcon Flynn would never quit that place alive.

The detective's time had come, and they would show this keen ferret of the streets and byways of Gotham that it was dangerous to fool with keen people like the Eureka's managers.

Deuce O'Diamonds looked at his visitor and allowed a smile to come to his face.

They were alone.

"Good night!" saluted the spider. "To whom do I stand indebted for this visit?"

"My name is Lacey—Luke Lacey," answered the detective, coming forward.

"You manage the Eureka Investment Company, don't you?"

"I am managing it just now. Want to know something about it, eh?"

"I thought I might invest if the plans and promises suit."

"We never fail to please our patrons. Sit down, please."

Now there were but two chairs in that room, and one of these Deuce O'Diamonds occupied.

The other stood over the deadliest of traps; the remaining ones had been removed for the occasion.

As he spoke Deuce O'Diamonds waved his hand toward the fatal chair and a shadow of disappointment overspread his face when the so-called Lacey refused the proffer.

On the contrary, the detective leaned against the table, folding his arms and looking about the room, not forgetting to take in the large fictitious map of the new mines, which, roughly drawn, but very significant in details, occupied one of the walls.

Deuce O'Diamonds was nettled.

"It will take me some little time to explain the modus operandi of our method, and you will feel better seated," he continued, after waiting a minute.

He was afraid he might lose his prey.

The detective might escape without the pressing of the button. That would never do.

The detective leaned forward and picked up the chair, carrying it around the table, and then coolly sitting down in it.

Deuce O'Diamonds nearly fell off his own seat, for this was an unexpected move.

"I will listen, now," intimated the Falcon. "I believe you hold forth some excellent inducements to investors."

"We do," averred the rascal, recovering a little. "In fact, we think we have the best money-making scheme in the city."

"How long have the mines been open?"

"About six months."

"And they pay?"

"Pay? Ask our investors," and the speaker waved his hand toward the unseen army of dupes.

"By the way, would you mind giving me the names of some of those who have taken stock. I might care to investigate a little."

Deuce O'Diamonds opened a drawer in the table and fingered after his ledger.

What did this man mean, talking thus?

Did he suspect that he had been lured to a trap? Was he aware that near him lay the trap-door of death, and would he presently play a hand that would expose it?

No wonder Deuce O'Diamonds in his dilemma wished for Hylo Jack.

He spread on the table a map, smaller than the wall affair, and placed it in such a position that the ferret-sport could not see much from where he then was.

All this was for the purpose of bring-

ing back the chair to its original position over the trap-door.

The sleek finger of the oily villain moved over the surface and he talked knowingly of leads and shafts, of dividends and pockets, until Falcon Flynn had to smile to himself.

He knew that Deuce O'Diamonds was talking for a dark purpose.

He no longer doubted that he had come to a death-trap—the whole manner of the rascal spoke that.

"But the patrons?" said he, a little anxiously. "That speaks best for an enterprise."

"Yes. Here is the book."

Out came a narrow ledger, with a blue cover, and the hand of Deuce O'Diamonds opened it.

Falcon looked up and down the page.

"Where's your friend?" he suddenly asked.

"My friend?"

"Yes, Jack."

Deuce O'Diamonds stuttered a little.

"I see you have put down a friend of mine," remarked the detective.

"Which name, please?"

"Doctor Stemway, here—Doctor Julius, he is sometimes called."

"I distinctly recall him. He investigated the workings of the Eureka and took stock afterward."

"That's a good recommendation. Doctor Julius would not go into anything blindfolded."

This was getting too exasperating for Deuce O'Diamonds.

The fly was in the trap, but he was not going to allow himself to be killed.

Time was precious, and the smooth-faced villain feared that he would lose the prey altogether.

The door beneath the room opened and shut.

What did it mean?

Maybe Hylo Jack had come in, or perhaps Nixon had come back to see if the plot had worked.

The room directly under the office was not tenanted, but was a part of the trap.

The opening of the door in the second floor opened one in the room below, and thus there was a straight dark chute to eternity.

Deuce O'Diamonds breathed hard.

He appeared to suffocate.

The tiger got the better of his nature and the serpent part of the man vanished.

All at once he pushed the map aside.

"It's time to shut up," said he.

Falcon Flynn had outwitted the plotter. He leaned forward and their eyes met.

Deuce O'Diamonds threw a quick look toward the door.

Some one was out there, and just then bit of paper fluttered over the transom.

It told him much.

Jack was out there.

Deuce O'Diamonds measured the distance between him and the Falcon, and appeared satisfied.

They might be pretty well matched, but he prided himself upon his ability to conquer Falcon Flynn in a hand to hand encounter.

Nixon Nox's parting words still rang in his ears—"Don't let him escape!"

Suddenly Deuce O'Diamonds came around the short table with the suppleness of a jumping jack.

"You will invest or die!" cried he, as he threw himself forward, and at the same time elevated his voice, for a purpose.

At the same moment the door opened, and Jack bounded into the room.

"Here, quick! Take hold of him!" cried Deuce O'Diamonds as Hylo Jack, somewhat startled by the scene which presented itself, halted in the middle of the room. "We must keep this man here; you know that."

Flynn at that moment delivered a blow which sent Deuce O'Diamonds halfway toward the wall map, but at the same instant, as it were, Hylo Jack, with a cry which resembled the roar of a wild beast, leaped forward.

The detective was seized around the neck and the great arms of the second

man seemed to have the contracting powers of an anaconda.

Deuce O'Diamonds recovered in a moment and between the two the detective was caged.

"Sit him in the chair, now," ordered Deuce O'Diamonds.

Flynn had been well choked, but he was conscious.

The chair was placed over the trap and he was dragged toward it.

In another moment he had been placed in it and the arms of Hylo Jack held him down.

At the same time the rascal stepped back so as to get clear of the trap-door.

Deuce O'Diamonds took a seat in his old chair and looked triumphantly into the face of their victim.

"What do you think now of the powers of the Eureka?" he grinned.

There was no response.

"You're at the end of the tether. You are not Luke Lacey. You are Falcon Flynn, detective."

"What if I am?"

"That confession dooms you."

"So you say."

"You are now sitting in a chair which stands directly above a bottomless pit. You will fall in a second down, down to death! What have you to say? With all your cunning the enemy has caught you."

What could the captured ferret say?

His arms had been fastened to the chair with steel clamps, which had been placed there for the purpose, and he was practically helpless.

Jack fell back with a hurried look toward the door.

"One word before we shoot you into eternity," said Deuce O'Diamonds.

"What did Manta Kent tell you?"

A smile came to the detective's face, but he did not pay any attention to the query.

"Oh, keep the secret, then," laughed Deuce. "Dead men tell no tales in this instance as well as in the past. Within ten days the Eureka will have vanished because we will have found a better nest-egg, and you will become one of the mysteries of the police. Even now my foot is on the fatal button which is underneath the carpet, and when I press it the floor opens at your feet and, presto! you are wiped out of existence."

The Falcon looked down at the floor, and as he did so he saw the foot of the villain slide forward.

CHAPTER XV.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

If one had entered the office of the Eureka ten minutes later he would not have seen anybody.

The gas was out and the room quite dark.

A match would have revealed no signs of tenants and the whole house seemed as silent as a grave.

Nixon Nox, in another part of the city, was smoking one of his fragrant cigars, with his heels upon the soft green cloth of a table and smoke rings were floating airily over his head.

The city sharp seemed at peace with all the world.

His chamber, luxuriously furnished, gave out tokens of great wealth and the tenant was enjoying himself.

Why should he not?

He looked up with a half start as the door opened and there came into the room Deuce O'Diamonds.

In another instant the heels dropped from the table and the young man was all attention.

There was triumph in the manager's eyes and he came forward with one of his peculiar grins.

"It's all O. K., captain," he announced.

"He came, did he?"

"It was the purtiest worked game you ever saw; not a hitch anywhere along the line."

"You're a trump!"

"Always was one, eh? Didn't I tell you that it would work like a charm? An' it did!"

Deuce O'Diamonds helped himself to a cigar and then sat down.

He was well dressed, and the paste diamond on his bosom gave out a certain light which would have deceived the gullible.

"I say," continued Deuce O'Diamonds, leaning forward and suddenly becoming a little confidential, "Don't you think it would be a good thing to take a look into his nest? You know he may have left some memoranda behind."

"About his visit to the office?"

"Just so. From the way he acted before we sprung the trap he came thither with his eyes well open; and he tried to balk us, besides."

"He did?"

"But you see it was impossible for him to get ahead of both Jack and me. He just couldn't do it, and I thought it might be a good idea to search the little room. You know where it is."

"Yes."

"I'll go if you say so, cap'n," said Deuce O'Diamonds. "I'm equal to the emergency, I guess."

"If you did the one you are certainly able to perform the other trick."

"I'm off, then," and the man rose to his feet and appropriated another cigar.

He was watched to the door by the keen eyes of Nixon Nox, who suddenly asked:

"Did he go down without a cry?"

"A sort o' sharp little cry, which was soon over and then silence came."

"And the trap worked?"

"Like a charm. Never a break o' any kind. Only the floor is spoiled a little."

"The button did good work?"

"It an' my heel," grinned Deuce O'Diamonds. "Both put together was a pair of Jacks hard to beat."

"Of course. You're a trump, I say, O'Diamonds."

There was a toss of the listener's head, and then he opened the door.

"Come back if you find anything there," called the city sharp. "Don't get into trouble; but your head is old enough to go on without advice."

"Bet your last dollar, cap'n," came from the hall, and Deuce O'Diamonds was gone.

Down on the street he looked about him, drew the collar of his coat up over his jowls and started off.

"Before long," said he, with a chuckle, "I'll have a better nest-egg than the Bureka. He's going to win in this game for gold, and I know the way to his purse strings. If I thought I could make a bargain with Stella—the right sort o' bargain—I'd go an' see her before I come back."

He walked in silence after this for a while, and then broke out again:

"There's something about Stella that takes. What care I if she has cut her eye teeth and knows how to play a dark hand? That only makes her a better life partner, for she'll never run out o' wits and we'll always have a nest-egg. I'll win Stella an' together we'll squeeze the golden goose pretty often."

Thirty minutes after this Deuce O'Diamonds turned into a certain street which landed him in the vicinity of Falcon Flynn's lodgings, and in a short time he ran up the stairs leading to them.

He knew where to go, did this sleek rascal, and when he had gained the top of the flight he walked straight to the detective's door.

It was locked, but he opened it.

Deuce O'Diamonds had come to the place prepared for the emergency, and his adroitness let him into the room.

Of course it was tenantless, for he knew where the Falcon was at that hour.

Deuce O'Diamonds turned on the gas and began to search the room with the cleverness of one who had searched rooms before.

He looked into everything that was not locked, and then with a lot of skeleton keys and bits of wires he peeped into places which the ferret-sport had closed against just such fellows as he.

He went over to the table at last and sat down.

But he had scarcely taken a seat ere he was startled by a strange cry and he

looked up to see a white-faced young girl before him.

"The girl from Jersey," he said, under his breath. "Manta Kent, who lives with Mother Iron-Hand."

There stood Manta Kent, staring at the villain in the ferret's room, and he was looking at her while he got second wind and collected his scattered thoughts.

"You are not Mr. Flynn," said she, hesitating between advancing and flight.

"Do I look like him?" replied Deuce O'Diamonds. "Take a seat, miss. I'm waiting for him."

"When will he come in?"

"That's pretty hard to tell."

"Soon, think you?"

"He might, but I suppose it's owing to business. You know him, don't you?"

Manta was cautious.

She did not like to confide to this man her relations with the detective.

"I have met him before," said she, after a moment's mental debate.

"I thought so. You've got a job for Mr. Flynn, eh?"

Deuce O'Diamonds leaned forward in a patronizing manner as he spoke, and Manta recoiled with a quick cry.

"Why, you're the same man!" said she.

Color left the man's face and he stammered and turned his head away.

The girl colored, too, but said nothing. She had spoken a little too fast.

But it was too late to take back her words and she resolved to put a bold front on it.

"I'm the same man, am I? What man, miss?" asked Deuce O'Diamonds.

"Why, the one who came to Fernbank after Hamish Kent went away."

He shook his head.

"I don't know Hamish Kent, and Fernbank may be in the Congo basin for aught I know."

He was putting on a bold front, as the girl could see, but this did not deter her.

She stepped forward, suddenly calm, and looked him squarely in the face.

"I saw you in the lightning's flash the night of the storm," she resumed. "It was not the first time you had been to Fernbank. You came to see him in the little shop."

"To see who, miss? By Jove! all this is Greek to me."

"Stop!" cried Manta, throwing up her hand. "You cannot deceive me. I don't know what you are called in this city, but at Fernbank you got a letter addressed to Mr. D. O'Diamonds. The old postmaster handed it to you."

"That's a funny charge."

"You lost the envelope which contained that letter that night, for I found it."

The listener almost winced, and it was with much difficulty that he kept his composure.

"You know where he is! You must know, for he came to New York—brought with him, as I verily believe, his tools and little inventions. Hamish Kent has buried himself somewhere in this great city. He left Fernbank between two days and left no clew behind him save the letter you lost and one other."

"I'm sorry to have to dispute with you, miss—deuced sorry. In the first place, you must have seen some other person in the lightning's flash—"

"I did not! The moment you leaned forward it all came back to me and again you photographed your figure on my mind as it was photographed there that night."

"But you see I was in the city then; I haven't been out of it for a year."

"Oh, you can prove an alibi, can you?"

"A dozen o' 'em, miss, if one won't satisfy you."

"One good one would be enough," replied Manta, with a faint smile, which told that she did not believe Deuce O'Diamonds.

"But I saw you near the house that night, and another time I saw a man very much like you near the same spot."

"It's almost funny enough for a comedy," laughed Deuce O'Diamonds. "Saw me at Fernbank, eh? And want me to say what has become of one Hamish Kent. Relative of yours, girl?"

This was more than Manta could stand, and the next moment she seemed to

touch Deuce O'Diamonds with the tip of her finger.

"You can't deceive us," she exclaimed. "You are mixed up in this affair and we intend to straighten things out, no matter whom it hurts. Your lies—you will pardon me, they are nothing else—shall not shield you, and the time is coming when the hand of Falcon Flynn will pull off every mask and lay bare the crimes and dark places of those who strike in secret."

"Why don't you go on the stage?" put in Deuce O'Diamonds, trying new tactics.

"But you're a Jersey girl, you say?"

"I came from Fernbank. I am the ward of Hamish Kent, the man whom you visited time and again on a mission of some sort. I can't tell you why you came, but you will know. You shan't play through the game—the infamous game—that has been inaugurated. The woman who robbed me of my purse on the train—"

"Got plucked comin' on, eh?" broke in Deuce O'Diamonds, with a look of glee.

"I was robbed on the train by one who belongs to the gang. I was plundered of evidence which would have given Falcon Flynn, the detective, a clew to a dark crime. You know that. Perhaps you knew I was coming to New York and so posted the woman in black."

"I, miss?"

"Why not? If you came to Fernbank and was on intimate terms with the postmaster, who is old, but full of cunning, why shouldn't you know the secrets of the mails?"

Deuce O'Diamonds again broke into a laugh which greatly nettled Manta Kent.

"Come! I guess I won't wait for the detective. You seem to have the most important business with him, so I'll let you have the house to yourself till he comes."

Manta watched him cross the room to the door, and once she glanced down at his feet.

"Good-night, and a pleasant wait, miss," said Deuce O'Diamonds, at the door. "I wish you all success—"

"You do not!" she exclaimed. "You belong to the cabal. You know where Hamish Kent is and you shall tell me before you're much older."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GIRL FROM JERSEY'S ADVENTURES.

Deuce O'Diamonds halted just outside the detective's door, and for a second glared at the closed portal.

The words—the threat uttered by Manta Kent—still rang in his ears.

"She ought to be watched," said he, under his breath. "She gave the whole thing away. She will look for Hamish Kent, and we can't afford to have him found by her; not yet, at least."

He appeared on the eve of going back into the ferret's room, but suddenly changed his mind and went away.

Manta was left alone.

She had left Mother Iron-Hand's for the purpose of consulting with Falcon Flynn, but she did not know that the detective had fallen into the spider's trap.

Then she had recognized Deuce O'Diamonds as the man seen one night in Fernbank.

There could be no mistake.

There were the same face and figure and the same large feet which she knew by the marks left in the soft ground near Hamish Kent's little workshop.

The girl from Jersey was sure she was not mistaken.

Manta waited nearly an hour for the detective's return, but waited in vain; no one came.

She grew tired at last; the vigils threatened to become endless if she remained there.

She scrawled a note for the missing ferret and left it on the table, where she knew he would find it when he came.

Having done this, she stole from the place, going down to the street.

Manta looked carefully around for Deuce O'Diamonds, but he was not in sight.

She started back home, for Mother Iron-Hand's was her abode for the present.

Suddenly a footstep was heard behind her and she looked over her shoulder.

A man was coming up with eager, almost noiseless strides.

Manta increased her gait, but there was no escaping this fellow, and in a little while he was alongside.

The girl from Jersey turned upon him with a withering look, but he merely bowed a trifle and smiled.

"It's all right, miss," said he, and Manta noticed that he had small, deep-set eyes, and that, while he looked rough, he was not altogether unhandsome.

"You're going back to Mother Iron-Hand's, aren't you?"

"What is it to you if I am?"

"It's more to you than to me, p'raps," was the reply.

"I don't understand you."

"Of course you don't, seein' that you don't know what I happen to know, miss."

There was a confidential manner about the man that arrested Manta's attention, and he kept on, seeing that she was interested.

"You're liable to have a visitor."

"I?"

"You, miss; and, what's more, it's liable to be one o' your own sex, which makes it all the more dangerous."

"Do you mean to tell me that I am in danger?"

"You may call it that, and it's my opinion that if you did you wouldn't miss the mark more'n a mile."

The girl from Fernbank walked on in silence for a moment, but her thoughts recurred to her visit to Falcon Flynn's house.

Had this man been on the watch, and had he shadowed her from the detective's door?

"If you'll let me suggest something, I would suggest that you change quarters within the next two hours."

She looked at him, but made no reply.

"The serpent intends to sting you, I'm pretty sure o' that, or she would not have sought information of the interior of Mother Iron-Hand's den."

"It's not a den, sir," cried Manta, flushing.

"I'raps not; but let that go, miss. Won't you get out o' there?"

"And transfer myself to a place already selected by you?"

"I don't say that. I don't want to dictate to you where you shall stay while you're in the city, but you don't want to remain where you are now."

"You have offered me no proof that I'm in danger at Mother Iron-Hand's," said she. "Until you do so I shall refuse to consider removal. You must understand that we never met before, and that I don't know nor can I guess your motives."

"Speakin' of the latter first, miss, they're good ones. I don't want to see any harm come to you, but you're in positive danger at Mother Iron-Hand's."

"The proof," responded Manta Kent.

For a moment the man who had kept at her side all the time turned his head away and seemed to be collecting his thoughts.

At the same time he appeared to be halting between two opinions; but, all at once, he turned toward the girl, and his hand, dropping suddenly to his side, clutched her wrist.

"You want the proof? That I cannot give without betraying a friend," said he. "I'd like to go into details and tell you everything, but I can't. Only go away from Mother Iron-Hand's. I don't care where you go. I don't ask that you tell me where you hide, for hide is the word that fits the case. Only go."

She looked up at him and saw intense eagerness and anxiety pictured in his countenance.

"You say you betray a friend of yours when you give me proof of what you have said."

"I do, and that is why I can't give it."

"Do you know Hamish Kent?"

It was a query that positively startled the man at Manta's side.

He dropped her wrist, and seemed to fall back, but kept his coolness with an effort.

The girl saw that the arrow had gone home.

"You know him. Do you belong to the secret keepers, too? You can tell me where he is, and as you know me, you must not withhold that information."

"Well, you're a brick," laughed the man. "You think I know a man called Hamish—Hamish Kent. Do you?"

Manta was looking him squarely in the eye.

"You know him," she charged.

"I know him. Now go away from Mother Iron-Hand's. Get out of the reach of this vulture with the long white talons."

"A woman, you say? Is it the woman who robbed me on the train?"

"You're a good guesser."

"Ah, 'tis she!" cried Manta. "You know her, do you? And it is against this creature you warn me? Good! I will remain at Mother Iron-Hand's till she comes. She is the very woman I want to see and the sooner she comes the better."

"Come, don't be foolish, miss! Don't remain in the web till the death-dealing spider comes and finishes you. This is no child's play. I risk my own life when I warn you."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind that. I'm nothing to you, but I can't see you pounced upon like a fly in the tangle. By Jove! I won't see it if I can prevent."

"I don't know whether to believe you or not, since you won't tell me who you are. I am to quit Mother Iron-Hand's after having been directed there by a friend who regarded me as safe beneath her roof. Why should I fly without consulting him?"

"It will be everlastingly too late if you wait to see that friend. He can't be found just now."

"I know that. I have just come from his house."

"And he was not at home?"

"He was not in."

"I could have told you that before you went thither. I knew he was not at home."

Manta stopped at a corner, which she then had reached, and looked up at her companion.

He stopped with her, and for a moment seemed to be wrestling with a great mental question.

"If I told you where to find Hamish Kent would you quit Mother Iron-Hand's to-night?"

Manta studied a moment.

"I could tell Falcon Flynn about my adventure. I could send him word from my new home. I must find Hamish Kent at all hazards."

With this she looked at the man again.

"Tell me," she urged.

"But, you haven't given me any promise. You have not said that you would quit Mother Iron-Hand's if I told you how to find Hamish Kent."

"I will go. I promise you. I will seek other quarters within an hour. Now tell me."

He looked up and down the street, and then touched Manta on the arm.

"What will you do when you've found him?" he asked.

"I shall merely demand my rights."

"Oh, he's robbed you, then?"

"Not exactly, but he is the possessor of a secret which concerns my life."

"A birth secret, miss?"

"Perhaps."

"Very well. That's between you and him. Now, since you've promised to leave Mother Iron-Hand's to-night—an' in my opinion the sooner you do so the better for your welfare—here's the secret."

He leaned toward Manta, and she felt his hot breath on her cheek.

"You will find Hamish Kent on the second floor of Number 566 N— Street, and it's not a thousand miles from here either."

Manta made a mental note of the direction.

"You will find him there, or, at least, there's where he was when I heard from him last."

"When was that?"

"Two hours ago."

"Thank you," said the girl from Jersey. "Now, if I but knew whom I have to thank for this precious information I would be a little better pleased."

"Let that go. I'm satisfied with having warned you to keep away from Mother Iron-Hand's. She's all right; wouldn't harm a hair of your head; but you're in somebody's way—there!"

He stepped back and threw his ungloved hand to the brim of his slouch hat.

In another moment he had turned and was walking off.

Manta was alone on the street corner.

"Is all this true, or but a trap?" she asked herself. "Am I to be the fly in some deadly web? Oh, if I could but lay this whole thing before Falcon Flynn. Why not go back? He may be in by this time."

Waiting till the figure of the strange man was out of sight, the girl from Jersey started back.

"Why not find out just where N— Street is?" she suddenly thought, as the tall, well-rounded figure of a policeman came in sight. "He said it isn't a thousand miles from here, which means that it is somewhere in the neighborhood."

In another second Manta was standing before the kindly-looking patrolman, who was a little startled to see so much fresh beauty in his presence.

Manta, who had remembered the street and number, put her question.

"It's the next street down yonder, miss," said the policeman, pointing away. "About what number do you want?"

Manta did not care to be exact.

"Number 566," she said.

"Why, it's just around the corner, on the opposite side of the street."

The girl from Jersey thanked the officer and started off.

Hamish Kent, the fugitive inventor, so near.

She could hardly believe it, and yet something told her that she would soon confront him—perhaps at work.

With wildly-beating heart she started off and whisked round the corner.

She would see Hamish Kent first, and after that the shrewd detective.

Manta's feet fairly flew down the designated thoroughfare, and in a few moments she had crossed it and stood before the door of 566.

"Up-stairs—the second floor, the man said," she murmured, and then her hand caught the knob.

It turned!

Stepping into a darkish hall, the girl from Jersey, for the first time since inaugurating her present adventure, seemed to feel a quaver of fear.

She may have gone too far.

She was in an unknown house, and no one but herself knew where she was.

After all, it might be another trap.

"Trap or not, I will go up to the second floor!" said Manta Kent. "If he is here I will see him."

She ran up the steps and to a door which confronted her.

But before she could reach it it was opened from the inside and there came out the tall figure of a woman in black!

Manta uttered a cry and fell back.

It was her treacherous companion of the train—the woman who had robbed her of the little satchel and its terrible clew!

CHAPTER XVII.

PLUNDERED ONCE MORE.

For a moment Manta Kent, almost breathless, faced the woman who, emerging from the room ahead, had caught sight of her.

There was no mistaking that face.

It was, in truth, the woman in black, and the girl from Jersey felt a strange thrill take possession of her.

Manta could not have escaped, even if she had cared to.

She stood face to face with the fair robber.

Beyond this woman the young girl caught a glimpse of a man who had risen from a chair, and who stood in the middle of a well-lighted room.

Was that man Hamish Kent?

Manta felt like rushing forward and confronting him, but as if fearing such action, the woman in black threw out her hand and seized her arm.

"You've been tracking me, miss," she exclaimed.

Manta's blood was warm.

"Tracking you? Not so. But I know you. I have found you at last. You are the woman who exchanged the valises on the train—"

"You think so, do you? Don't you know, girl, that it is dangerous to make such charges?"

Manta was dragged back, and the door was closed.

The figure of the man in the room was shut off from her view, and she was alone with the strange woman—with Stella!

"He is in there," said Manta, resisting. "You must let me see him."

"Who think you is yonder, girl?"

"Hamish Kent, from Fernbank. I have found him at last."

The response was a cool laugh, after which she was pushed toward the top of the stairs, where the woman in black halted, while she looked daggers at her.

"You can't see the gentleman in the room," she said, sternly. "He doesn't want to be seen by you."

"I don't doubt that."

"Nor will he be faced by you now nor to-morrow. Come with me."

"With you? Whither?"

"That depends. So you think I'm the woman who changed valises."

"You are that person."

"Look at me again? Did we ever meet before? What a bold charge you make against a lady."

The very coolness of this woman in black amazed Manta.

They were half-way down the steps now, and her hand still seemed to sink deep into Manta's arm.

The girl from Jersey made an effort to break away and run up-stairs, but without avail.

"Not now. I am holding you, my bird," said the woman. "I am able to take care of a chit like you. Don't you know that you are on dangerous ground?"

Manta did not reply.

"I don't intend to clip your wings, even. I shall let you go for this time. But beware the next meeting!"

The young girl would have replied, but the following moment the front door was jerked open by the woman in black, and Manta was hustled out into the night.

All this did not seem to have occupied a minute.

Manta stood on the sidewalk gazing, half-stunned, at the plain house, above whose door was the number 566.

"I know where he is, but will he remain there, now that I have discovered him?" she asked herself, before she stirred.

"Who is that woman? I know she is the one who changed the valises by which I lost the clue that would have been of great assistance to Falcon Flynn, the detective; but, what is the strange influence she has over Hamish Kent? She must know who killed Ramon Rolfe in the Park. She knows why he was killed, else I would not have lost the mechanism which I was carrying to this city."

Manta did not attempt to re-enter the house, but moved away and thought again of the detective.

She would go back to his house at once.

Perhaps he had returned.

Thither she bent her steps, and reached the door.

This time she hoped she would not meet with Deuce O'Diamonds.

Falcon Flynn had not come home.

For some time Manta sat in the room which she had left unlocked and added a little to the message she had left for the ferret on her previous visit.

"Now for Mother Iron-Hand's," said she as she left the chamber, and down to the street below she went once more.

Manta's nerves were a little unstrung.

She had passed through enough excitement to give her quite a shock, and she felt the terrible tension as she hastened off.

This time she heard no wary footsteps behind her, nor saw a man sneaking like a thug at her heels.

This time she did not encounter the man who had warned her to give up her little room at Mother Iron-Hand's, and in the course of time she threw herself upon the couch in one corner of it.

Her strength had been exhausted, and she was faint and nervous.

Mother Iron-Hand heard the girl enter the house, and waited a while at the door which she had shut.

When she stole into the room she approached the bed and looked down into Manta's face.

"You slipped in an hour ago," said she.

Manta shook her head.

"I, Mother Iron-Hand? I have been away more than two hours."

"But I heard you. I heard you come in easily, and slip to this room. You must have come back for something, child."

Manta Kent was wide awake now.

"I did not come back," said she.

"But you must have come back, for who else would come?"

A sudden start answered Mother Iron-Hand, and Manta recalled the man's warning.

Had the woman in black been there?

Had she been looking for her in her retreat, and had she gone from Mother Iron-Hand's to the place where she had met her?

"Maybe I have been robbed again," cried the girl from Jersey, springing up and running over to a little desk which stood in one corner of the chamber.

Mother Iron-Hand's eyes kept track of her.

Manta seized the lid of the desk and threw it up without the least trouble.

"See! The lock has been broken," she cried, turning upon Mother Iron-Hand. "I have been robbed again."

"Robbed of what?" asked the old woman.

"Robbed of what I had written in case I met with an accident. I have been busy ever since I came to your house putting down on paper all I knew."

"And what was that, pray?"

Manta hesitated a moment, and then she came forward and stood confused for a second before Falcon Flynn's confidante.

"I'll tell you," said she. "I wrote down all I knew about Hamish Kent and his strange inventions—little boxes that held steel darts as fine as cambric needles."

"Hamish Kent?" cried Mother Iron-Hand. "Where is he?"

"I know, or at least I knew a while ago. Did you ever hear of that man?"

"Don't ask me that, but go on with what you put down on paper."

"I told all I knew about him, I say. I told about his life at Fernbank over the river. I told how he used to have secret meetings with old Joshua, the postmaster, and how a burly man used to come and be with him in the little workshop."

"Well?"

"There was little more for me to say, but I put it down in the plainest language I could, for something that is dark now hinges on what Hamish Kent has done."

"You don't mean that murder, child—the death of the rich man in the Park?"

"Who told you it might be murder, Mother Iron-Hand?"

"I know a few things which the outside world don't get at," she said, with a grin. "I get to share a good many secrets with Falcon, but this isn't one of them."

"He didn't tell you, then?"

"No."

"But, Mother Iron-Hand, when did you hear some one enter the house and what was that person like?"

"You forget that I did not see that person. I merely heard the door open and shut, and then footsteps came toward this room. I thought you had come back for something."

"Was it a light step?"

"Light, like a girl's. Oh! it was a she serpent, Manta, child."

The girl's cheeks blanched.

"Whoever came robbed me!" cried Manta. "The papers are gone, and they are now in the hands of the enemy. Perhaps Hamish Kent himself has read them!"

"You should have dropped in upon Falcon since you have been out on the streets."

"I have been to the office, but I saw no one there but the man who used to come to Fernbank to see Hamish Kent."

"Alone in the office?"

"Alone," and then Manta proceeded and related her interview with Deuce O'Diamonds.

"That tiger was there for a purpose," decided Mother Iron-Hand. "He did not go thither to engage the Falcon on a case; he went to play a cold, cruel hand."

"I believe it now."

The two women were silent for a moment; then Manta looked once more into the plundered desk.

Robbed!

She recalled the deft-looking hands of the woman in black, and saw again, as it were, the cold, serpent-like eyes that seemed to transfix her.

"I would have given worlds if I had waited till she came out of this room," suddenly cried Mother Iron-Hand. "What if I had stood over against the door in the hall yonder and waited for her ladyship? Why, Manta, I could have killed her like a fly, and I would have done it."

The dark, ironlike hands of the old woman were thrust into Manta Kent's face, and she doubted not that she would have carried out her threat had she been a little more knowing.

"They're lost, and there's an end of that," said the girl from Jersey, with a smile, as she came back from the desk. "I shall know how to take this creature from now on. I shall tell the detective when next I see him, and he will pick up an important link, for he must, from what I've seen to-night, connect Hamish Kent with the woman in dark garments."

"Of course."

Mother Iron-Hand bade Manta good-night, saying at the same time that she needed sleep, and in another moment she had stolen softly from the room, leaving the girl alone.

Mother Iron-Hand's countenance seemed to have undergone a startling change within the last few minutes.

"I think I can see through it all," said she, as she shut the door of another room behind her. "The child has been followed and robbed. She was foolish to write down what she was keeping as a secret, but she did not want to be taken off with nothing of her story in black and white. So Hamish Kent is in New York. I wonder if he is the same old Hamish I used to know. Why didn't I ask the child where to find him? I'll do it now."

Mother Iron-Hand stole back to Manta's room, but all was still there.

The fatigued girl from Jersey had thrown her wearied body across the bed and fallen asleep.

"Not now. I haven't the heart to waken her. Let her sleep it off," and with these words Mother Iron-Hand, though very anxious, stole out with the same caution.

"Wait till I see Falcon. I have something to say myself. Manta has put me onto it, and I'll say it, too."

She laughed as she went back to her side of the house.

When she saw Falcon Flynn!

If she had known of the trap in the home of the Eureka she might not have had these anticipations.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EMPTY TRAP.

The man who warned Manta Kent to leave Mother Iron-Hand's was no less a person than our old acquaintance, Hylo Jack.

This man, as we know, had furnished Stella Starr with a description of the interior arrangement of the old woman's house, and from that moment he regretted his action.

There was, at times, in the breast of Hylo Jack a spark of sympathy for the innocent and helpless.

This, however, did not prevent him from swindling the dupes of the Eureka Investment Company, and he and Deuce O'Diamonds made a good deal out of that not uncommon game.

He dared not tell his partner of his deed; he dared not go back to Deuce O'Diamonds and acquaint him with his leniency; but, on the contrary, he went in an opposite direction, after warning Manta.

Jack prided himself on having done a

good deed, and was inclined to feel proud over it.

"Stella must not know," said he to himself. "Never tell that keen-eyed and silk-handed woman. I would be in her way from the moment of the telling, and so I'll keep my secret."

About the time of Manta's return to Mother Iron-Hand's a man might have been seen in the neighborhood of the Eureka.

The shutters of the place had been tightly drawn, and he proceeded cautiously as he approached the house.

Hylo Jack had come back to the place at last.

He satisfied himself that no one was watching the house, and then, slipping hastily up the steps, he opened the door and glided inside.

Hylo Jack had come back for a purpose.

He was quite sure he would not find Deuce O'Diamonds at home, for he did not advance to the upper room, but entered a chamber directly beneath it.

This room was dark and carpetless.

Hylo Jack made his way to the middle of the place and got down on his knees.

His hand ran over the boards and now and then stopped a little while, as if he was not sure of his bearings.

He was evidently hunting for something important, and at last he stopped and kept his hand in a certain place for a second.

"Here's the trap—right under the one above," said he, in a low voice. "The ferret went down like a rock and we heard the lower trap shut after him."

Jack now struck a match and the little flame revealed his face with its breathless, eager expression.

The outlines of a trap-door were before him.

In another instant he had inserted a knife between one edge of the door and the flooring and was prying it up.

The moment it was lifted enough he rammed his head into the yawning pit and listened.

Everything was still down there.

His match had gone out and he was in darkness once more.

"I can't hear a sound," thought Hylo Jack. "Certainly he fell clear through when Ducey touched the button in the floor. But, heavens! What if there was a mischance?"

He produced another match and held it as it flashed up into the mouth of the pit.

At first he saw nothing, and by degrees he caught sight of the dark place, the bottom of which seemed to exist somewhere near the center of the earth.

"Mebbe the fall finished him," he opined, and then he threw the match downward, seeing it whirl over and over in its crazy descent until it at last lay still sending up a little blaze which illumined the bottom of the pit.

Hylo Jack gasped.

The place was empty!

The trap which they had set for the detective of New York, and toward which they had sent him without any compunctions, did not contain a living soul or a dead body.

No wonder his breath seemed to stop and his heart to stand still.

Empty!

Jack did not know what to do.

"Where did he stop at?—in this room?" he cried. "If he fell to the bottom why ain't he there now?"

No one answered.

Jack looked till the match went out, leaving the bottom of the pit once more in total darkness, and when he rose, cold beads of sweat stood on his forehead.

"The de'il's to pay now if this man is in the land o' the living," he confessed. "We sprung the trap, but he isn't in it. That means war to the knife an' the knife to the hilt. It means that somebody's goin' to be arrested, and who will it be but me an' Ducey?"

He fell back and left the room.

At the foot of the stairs in the hall he looked toward the street door and satisfied himself that it was locked.

Hylo Jack bounded up the steps and opened the office of the Eureka.

Reaching up with a good deal of eagerness he turned on the gas and sat down, still breathing hard.

"It's what I call a thunderbolt, an' I'm the feller what got it first. Gone! We dropped him into the death-pit, dropped him forty feet; but he didn't die. Where is he and what kind providence stopped him in the descent?"

Jack went over to the little sham safe set in one corner of the room and opened it.

"There's been a turnin' over here," he went on, after a glance. "The books are gone and the records o' the 'Reka. Has the Deuce O'Diamonds discovered that the pit is empty, an' is he off? It must be so."

Jack made a hasty search of the room, which confirmed him in his surmises, and then he went off.

"I must have money, but I won't tell the cap'n," he said, half aloud to himself in the hall below. "I'll never let on what I know; but I'll take enough to get away. The jig's up."

Down on the street, he walked fast and soon turned up in front of a house near the Manhattan Club.

The door opened at his ring, but no one greeted him.

Jack knew that a button had been pressed inside which opened the portal, and that Nixon Nox was at home.

The burly villain tramped into the room on the right of the hall and inhaled fragrant smoke as he opened the last door.

Nixon Nox was there.

A long smoking gown robed his person, and his slippers were elevated upon the edge of the table, while he enjoyed the late siesta.

Jack had tried to cool down; he did not want to betray his discovery and fright, and his voice was quite calm when he spoke.

"Deuce O'Diamonds tells me that the scheme worked like a charm," said the sharp.

"It couldn't work otherwise, cap'n," was the reply. "You saw that everything was O. K. before you left us."

The city sport blew a wreath of smoke to the ceiling and smiled.

"There's nothing like getting rid of these troublesome fellows in the start," he remarked. "We had to take the bull by the horns at once."

"Or feel the horns themselves, cap'n."

"Exactly. Now I'll attend to the other matter."

"You mean that you'll take a wife?"

"Right you are, old fellow. I don't intend to let grass grow under my feet. Jack, the man you robbed—"

"What does he say, cap'n?" broke in Jack.

"He seems as quiet, as mute as a mouse. He must have missed the papers, but he says nothing about them that I can learn."

"Maybe he's playing a cute game. P'raps he's put some detective on the trail."

"What if he has? They are in our hands and he will never see them again, detective or not."

"What does the girl say?"

"I haven't come to the point yet, but the next visit breaks the ice and feathers our nest."

"I hope so. You can't fail to win the fair Reva, cap'n."

"Fail?" cried Nixon Nox, throwing the remains of the cigar into a gilded spittoon and taking up another. "There must be no failure in this matter."

"If there is the jig's up forever and the Eureka winds up business."

"It may wind up its affairs after the fish has been landed," observed Nixon Nox. "You see, Jack, we'll all be so well fixed after that that we needn't depend on the Eureka for a livelihood."

Hylo Jack was silent for a moment and then he pushed his chair near the table.

"Would you mind letting out a little just now, cap'n?" he said, confidentially.

"How much, Jack?"

"Say five hundred."

There was a start and Nixon Nox stared at the dark-faced man before him.

"I'm no millionaire—not just yet!" he exclaimed.

"I know that, but I'm nearly strapped. See here. I haven't a five to my name."

"But five hundred, man! Don't you mean a mere fiver?"

"I mean five hundred!" and the words seemed to come from between clinched teeth. "We're all in the swim, cap'n, and there's few secrets what don't b'long to all o' us."

Nixon said nothing but watched the speaker with eager, half-flashing eyes.

"You don't want to rob me," he cried. "Wait a little while. You will soon have all the money you want. When I have played out my hand the stakes will all be in it, and we'll roll in clover."

"I can't wait; I must have a little now. When you become the husband of Reva Rolfe you'll have all the money you want, but you must remember that you can't reach that goal if Hylo Jack steps in between."

There was a poorly hidden threat in these words and the handsome swell saw it.

In an instant his face changed color and he leaned forward toward his visitor with his teeth set hard.

"None of that!" he hissed. "You must understand that you can't dictate till the game's ended."

"I can't, eh? Who said anything about dictating? I merely mentioned the fact that it would be a failure after all if I took a notion."

"That's a threat, man."

"Call it what you please."

Hylo Jack was becoming stubborn, and his muscles seemed to twitch with rage as he looked at his master.

"You don't want to save the game, I see," he went on, rising and standing over Nixon Nox with folded arms. "You think you can browbeat me. You can't. I say that to your teeth. Five hundred dollars or exposure."

Nixon Nox did not move, but his lips seemed to flutter a little.

"Is that the ultimatum?" he said.

"It is nothing else."

"Then you know where the door is and where the detectives hold forth. Go out and tell the whole story. Go out and tell all you know and get what you can from them. But be careful that you tell the whole truth. Be careful that, while you are at it, you give the ferrets a full account of your own delectable career, for I swear that if you leave out a single little event it will be supplied when I come to take the stand."

These words, coolly spoken, seemed to pierce Hylo Jack like poisoned darts.

He recoiled, snapping his tigerish teeth with rage, and for a moment longer looked at Nixon Nox in half defiance.

"Go!" cried the city sport, striking the table with his fist. "You can't remain here. Go out and tell the police! Put them on my trail, and at the same time finish your own career—you know how!"

Hylo Jack looked a while longer at Nixon Nox, then, as the sharp did not go on, he turned abruptly and bounded from the room.

"It was the only way I could retaliate," muttered the handsome plotter, picking up another cigar. "He won't do anything of the kind. He'll be back here on his knees to-morrow. I know that man and he belongs to me, body and soul."

We shall see, Mr. Nox.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INDEFATIGABLE TRACKER.

The escape of Falcon Flynn, the detective, from the trap was no longer a myth.

The empty pit was proof enough that the bird had forced the cage, even admitting that he had reached the dark bottom, but had he?

Manta Kent might have waited a long time for the ferret-sport in the latter's lodgings.

Deuce O'Diamonds might have sat in

his chair many hours waiting, after searching the premises, yet he would not have encountered the famous detective.

Nevertheless, the ferret was at large.

If either Hylo Jack or Deuce O'Diamonds had been in another part of the city about the hour of the interview between the former and Nixon Nox he might have seen a man engage lodgings in a quiet house of three stories.

This house was not far from Mother Iron-Head's place, but not on the same street.

After hiring a room in the front, second story, the new lodger, who wore a full grayish beard, in keeping with his years, which seemed to be about forty-five, strolled out into the streets.

Perhaps it was by design that he went toward the Manhattan, or perhaps by accident.

At any rate, he turned up in that particular locality and was seen strolling leisurely past the building.

Not far from the club-house, as we already know, lived Nixon Nox.

The man with the grayish beard went toward his place and crossed the street just before he reached the residence.

His glances wandered frequently toward the house itself, and when he happened to see the front door open and a man come down the steps he grew interested.

The person who emerged from Nixon's abode started off and the watcher set after him—keeping on the opposite side of the street, but all the time holding him under keen surveillance.

Hylo Jack—for it was this fellow who had been seen to quit the house—was well watched till he turned into a narrow street and there appeared to vanish.

This did not baffle his pursuer.

Jack dodged into a small den where he knew he could get a quiet drink, with a sandwich, at a table all to himself, and after his startling talk with Nixon Nox he wanted a little time for reflection.

He had been there before, and the round little clerk of the establishment nodded pleasantly as he came in.

Jack walked down the room to the last little curtained stall on the left.

In another moment his legs were under the table and the waiter had taken his order.

The blood of the tool of the Eureka was hot.

The last words of Nixon Nox rang in his ears and he stopped in his flow of imprecations against the man.

He had been boldly warned not to play out the hand he had threatened.

If he did his career would come to a sudden halt.

"You know how!"

Well did he know how.

The more he thought of this threat the more he cooled down.

"They will needle me, that's what they'll do," said he to himself. "I don't care to be picked up by the police and have a lot of surgeons looking for a steel needle in my anatomy. It's not a pleasant thought; but he treated me so coolly, even refusing to give me a dollar, that I ought to peach."

Jack continued in this strain till his order came, and then he began to partake.

The curtain had fallen back behind the waiter and the dingy folds hid him from those in the outer room.

"Why not quietly slip out of town?" thought Jack. "The detective is out of the trap, and if I stay for the purpose of making a stake I may find something on my wrists. I'll go and this very night."

He thus made up his mind in favor of flight.

He finished and rose, stretching himself and at the same time pulling his hat over his eyes.

"I'm all right now. Duce will wonder what's become of me, but I'll be out o' the game—out of it forever, I hope. I'm off now."

In the outer room among the habitués of the Golden Apple many looked at him, but did not seem to suspect that he was a man with an important secret.

Hylo Jack was eager to quit the place, not only that, but the city as well.

"Don't be in a hurry," said a voice at his elbow, and the next moment he stopped on the sidewalk and looked at the speaker.

There stood beside him a man with a grayish beard, and the eyes into which Jack looked seemed to pierce him like arrows.

"Don't walk so fast, I say," repeated the stranger. "I would like to see you a minute."

"See me?" stammered the man of the Eureka.

"Why not? Let's go back."

"I can't," demurred Jack. "In fact, I've just come out o' there, and I'm going home."

"All right. I'll go along."

This was the essence of coolness on the part of the stranger, and Hylo Jack bit his lip.

Jack gave him a look calculated to make him steer off, but this was the last thing the stranger intended doing.

They walked away together.

Hylo Jack was not going home.

He had lately come from the rooms of the Eureka and they were deserted.

Besides this, he had quietly promised himself that he would never cross that threshold again, and if he got rid of this man, this cool, impudent fellow with the grayish beard, he would soon be quit of the whole thing.

Whither should he steer this man?

Jack thought rapidly.

Time was precious and he could not afford to loiter by the way, for was not the trap empty and the detective still on the trail?

His companion was patient. He did not seem to care how long it took them to get to Jack's lodgings, just as if he had the whole night at his command.

All at once the man of the Eureka turned suddenly and confronted his comrade.

"I beg pardon, but I would like to know why you care to see me," he snapped.

"A little matter of business, nothing more."

"It will keep, won't it?"

"Not this business, sir."

"It won't, eh?"

"I don't want to invest in the New Eldorado. That's exploded. I want to see you on other business of more importance. Do you turn here?"

Jack suddenly turned and the river lay before them.

In another moment, the man of the Eureka, inwardly cursing his ill luck, had stopped and was looking straight into the face before him.

He had seen those eyes before.

He had surely seen them and beneath them was no gray beard.

Where had he faced those piercing orbs and why had they sought him out now?

Ah, he remembered now.

Those eyes had looked at both him and Deuce O'Diamonds in the office.

He had seen them in the head of the victim of the trap—Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective.

It was all plain now, and the startling truth came to Jack with the suddenness of a lightning stroke.

In the toils so soon?

The hunter had found him. The victim of the pit had run him down and he was within reach of his hands.

The thought thrilled him; it went through his brain like a flash of light.

Should he try to escape, or should he tell this man into another trap?

"Why not tell him what I know and thus balk the woman and all the rest o' them, Nixon included?" he said to himself. "Nixon threatened that if I betrayed the gang I would perish in a certain horrible manner—I know how. To escape, I must betray them all. I must do it thoroughly; no half-way work. Shall I?"

Jack walked on again.

The man seemed to read his very thoughts.

"Here we are," said Hylo Jack, stopping short in front of a poor looking three-story building.

"Your house, eh?"

"Yes, third flight, back. Not a very nice place, but it's good enough for a man o' my caliber. Coming up, eh?"

Already the suspected detective was at the door which Jack had pushed open.

He did not know the third room back.

He knew the house, though—knew that it was a perfect labyrinth of corridors and little rooms illy ventilated; he had been there before, but not to remain long.

As a trap it was just the thing he needed.

Jack was startled at the man's coolness when he saw him enter the house, at his heels.

He led the way up-stairs and was a little surprised to see that they met none of the inmates of the old shell.

That was fortunate for his plans.

The third floor was reached, and there they found shadows enough.

"The third room back, you said," suddenly spoke the stranger, laying hold of Jack's arm. "See here, my man. You are simply playing a little game. You are taking the chances."

"Sir?"

"You're taking the chances, I tell you," he repeated. "That's just what you're doing. This is no more your home than it is a dove's nest. But the place will do. We've passed half a dozen empty rooms; any one of them will do to talk in."

Jack's lower jaw dropped and he stared at the cool head.

It was plain now. The man was certainly the escaped detective.

For a moment the man of the Eureka went back to the wall and there he stood like a lion at bay.

His face had lost color, and was almost white; he had strained his muscles to their utmost tension, and he wondered if he would not have to leap at the throat of the detective.

"Here, this room will do," said the detective, opening a door within reach of his hand. "You can talk to me in here."

Jack stepped into the room involuntarily and turned on the detective with eager hands.

"Strike a light, please. There must be gas in the house."

Jack set his teeth hard.

"Strike a match yourself, if you want light on the subject," he growled.

It was done almost before the last word had left his lips and the next instant the jet was found and lighted.

Jack's spring was broken, for the detective was looking at him, with very little space between their faces.

He had delayed his tactics too long.

"You know me," said the Falcon. "You remember seeing me descend through the trap in the house of the Eureka. Well, your pit didn't hold me very long. I am here—here to listen to the unvarnished story of the plot."

Jack set his lips hard.

"Come. You don't intend to keep it back. You don't want to find yourself in the grip of justice."

"I don't know anything."

Falcon Flynn leaned forward and spoke a word.

The effect was startling and instantaneous.

Hylo Jack's arms dropped at his sides and he exclaimed:

"My God!"

CHAPTER XX.

HYLO JACK'S STORY.

The Flash Detective evidently knew what he had in reserve against this cunning swindler.

He waited for a moment to see what effect his shot had on Hylo Jack, and it pleased him.

Deuce O'Diamond's partner sat motionless for a moment after his sudden start, and then he shot a rapid glance at the door.

But there was no escape; the detective stood between him and the closed portal.

"What is it you want to know?" Jack asked.

"That is a question you might have answered yourself. You know what I want to find out."

The cornered sharp drew a long breath. Well did he know.

"There is one thing I don't know," said he; "and I guess that is the important part of what you're after."

"Tell what you know, and I will be the judge."

Hylo Jack hesitated a moment, perhaps for the purpose of making a proper beginning, but all at once he said:

"What's to follow my story?"

"That depends."

"All right."

There were two chairs in the deserted nest, and the man of the Eureka dropped into one of these, while Falcon Flynn stood underneath the gas-jet and waited.

"I will begin with Doctor Julius," said Jack. "I begin with him because you know him, but there is something about the man you don't know."

"Dr. Stemway is the man who plied the knife on the body of Ramon Rolfe, but this is no new information to you, eh?"

The detective nodded.

"Some years ago Doctor Julius lost his wife. She died under peculiar circumstances, but no one can say that it was foul play, although he knows all about the poisons and chemicals that kill in the twinkling of an eye."

"Doctor Julius was not the man to be drawn into a speedy marriage, but he got into the toils of a pretty face all the same."

"Married again, did he?"

"Yes. By his first wife he had a child, a girl who turned up missing after a night of excitement in this city. I can't tell you how it came about, for there seems to be something still unexplained about the disappearance."

"We'll let the child go, eh? We can't unearth one who has been missing for years, and who may have filled an unknown grave ever since. I am satisfied that he does not know himself what became of his offspring, but Stella does."

"Stella?"

"Yes; the leopardess in the game," smiled Jack. "That's what I call her, anyhow."

He leaned toward the detective and continued in a low tone:

"Let me drop a little startling information right here. Stella, under other circumstances, would be called Mrs. Stemway."

"She is Doctor Julius's wife, then?"

"As I live!" said the sharp, solemnly. "She is the witch who roped him into a second and a secret marriage. I guess that is one of the doctor's secrets. Never told you, of course?"

The Falcon did not reply.

"I never had much stock in the Eureka," he went on, suddenly changing the subject. "Duce an' I manage it for another. You may know for whom?"

"Nixon Nox."

"That's right; and right here let me say that if I can hang that man, I'll do it—higher than Haman!"

"You've shook him, have you?"

"I intend to shake him. He wants to run the whole bake-shop, an' take all the profits. That's the way with these sleek Samsons. They want the lion's share or nothing."

"Who is Nixon Nox?"

"Now you have me," smiled Jack, "for there are a few chapters in his life that are sealed to me. He's no ex-convict or anything of that kind, for he's always been too slick for the police. But, he's a mystery."

"In what way?"

"In several. He goes for a prize with all the cunning of a fox. Now take this case in point:

"The moment he became acquainted with Ramon Rolfe—the moment he looked into that man's bank account, he began to plot. Besides the money, there is a pretty face in the bargain—the face of the girl called Reva Rolfe. But the old man stood in the way."

"Well?"

"You know what happened. You know that one evening while riding with Nixon Nox in the Park, Ramon Rolfe sprang up in the carriage, gave a great gulp, and died."

There seemed to follow an unearthly stillness, during which the cool detective watched the man in the chair and let him have his way.

He was coming to the important point.

"This man Ramon Rolfe died suddenly," continued Hylo Jack. "He just gasped and was gone. They say it was heart disease, these doctors did. Well, mebbe they were right."

Jack of the Eureka looked away, but there lingered at his sensual lips a little smile that was tinged with sarcasm.

"What do you think?" put the Falcon.

"I don't think."

"You know better, do you?"

"Did I say so? Have I accused any one of killing Ramon Rolfe? I only said he fell out of the carriage, that night in the Park, as dead as a mack'el. People have died like that before him—in the twinkling o' an eye—and nothing was said about it."

"But when he dies—men of your calling take the trail. Who gave you a suspicion? Was it the girl from Jersey?"

It seemed Falcon's turn to smile, and he could not repress it, Jack had come so suddenly to Manta Kent.

"You heard what Nixon Nox said. Wasn't it all probable?"

"It was."

"Of course. He was in the rig with Ramon Rolfe, the father, or the supposed father—I'll put it that way—of Reva. Reva was the stake in the game, and Ramon Rolfe stood between Nixon and the rest and success."

"How?"

"Now," cried Jack, "you're just trying me. I guess you've already ferreted that out. But I'll say this: Reva Rolfe had another sweetheart, got him yet for that matter, and this was the man whom Ramon Rolfe wanted to share his thousands with her."

"A rival, I see."

"Although Nixon was frequently with Ramon Rolfe, the rich man did not care a straw for him. He actually hated and feared the man."

"Feared him, you say?"

"Yes, for he seemed to see what Nixon was after, and I always believed that somehow or other he had picked up a chapter from Nixon's past."

"At any rate, he gave a great gasp and fell dead from the carriage in the dusky Park."

"Where were you that night?"

"At the 'Reka waiting for files," answered Jack, with a light chuckle.

"You don't accuse Nixon of taking Ramon's Rolfe's life?"

"I don't."

"You don't suspect that he had a hand in it?"

"I won't say that, but I almost know that he didn't kill him."

"Who did?"

It was a question for which the man seemed to be waiting.

He leaned back in his chair and let one hand fall upon his leg and rest there.

"I can't tell you that," said he. "I can't say who killed Ramon Rolfe, only I know Nixon Nox didn't."

"He wasn't shot."

"Of course not. Had he been there would have been a different verdict."

"Yes."

"He wasn't slugged with a sandbag, which might have been done from the shadows that prevailed."

"No."

"The doctors said 'heart failure,' and thus they buried him."

"Doctor Julius might have reached a different verdict."

"He examined the body, did he?"

"He was with it half an hour in secret after the rest were through with it."

This seemed startling news for Hylo Jack.

"I don't know anything about this. Is it true?"

"It is true."

"Then he may have found the—the infernal—"

The man stopped.

A slight noise which seemed to come from the adjoining room broke his sentence, and he held his breath.

"Well, go on," said the detective.

"You know," said he. "You must know something about this death in the Park. You have seen Doctor Julius, for I have tracked you from his house. You have talked with him alone; you have the story of that examination from Doctor Julius's own lips. Did he find it?"

"The steel needle?"

"Yes."

The swindler shuddered as he uttered the monosyllable.

"How did you know it was there?"

"I didn't know it. I—I—"

"You suspected, eh?"

"Did I say so?"

"Not in words; but your manner said as much."

"Let me stop here, please do," pleaded Jack, rising and laying one hand on the detective's arm. "I've gone far enough. You don't know what an awful threat I've heard this very night. It makes me shudder to think of it, knowing what I do."

"Why, man, you have but little more to tell. You are nearly at the end of your story."

"I know it, but I would rather stop here. You can find out the rest. That's your business. You got out of the trap we set for you—got out without a broken neck, an', so far as I can see, with a whole skin. You won't go pokin' 'round the 'Reka any more, for, truth to tell, the old business is played out. No more shares from now on—no more dupes and hoodwinked people."

Falcon Flynn saw that the man had been pumped pretty dry.

He had let him into the secret of the plot; he had told why Ramon Rolfe had been doomed to die, but the hand that killed him—that he had not disclosed.

As Jack had said, the remainder was the detective's work.

But the Falcon was not quite ready to let the man through his claws.

"If Ramon Rolfe had a steel needle in his heart," said he, looking into Jack's face, "where is the person who made it?"

Hylo Jack shook his head.

"You don't know, eh? Don't you know that it takes a genius to send a steel needle to the heart of a fellow-being after dark?"

"That's right. I guess a genius did it."

"It was sent from its home by an unerring hand and a sure eye. There was no sound. No report was heard, but Ramon Rolfe fell dead and in his heart was found a little shaft of shining steel."

"I can't say. I will see you later, Cap'n Flynn. This is not the last time for us to talk. Go out and see what you can discover, for this is your trail. I can't tell you anything more."

"You can and you shall!" said the Flash Detective, sternly. "Remember, what I said a while ago. Shall I repeat that word?"

"No, no. Let me have peace."

"All right. Now, where is Hamish Kent?"

Hylo Jack took a long breath and sent an anxious glance toward the door.

"He is not to be found where he was three hours ago," he said, with an effort.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE'S TRAIL.

Reva Rolfe was alone in the mansion from which had recently been carried to the tomb the body of the man who died in the Park.

The shades of night had fallen over the city, and she sat in the parlor, whose lights revealed the luxuriousness of her surroundings.

Reva expected no caller at that hour, but one was near at hand.

He came unannounced, but not unwelcome.

As Hardin Hawley mounted the steps of the Rolfe residence a man who had been following him some distance drew off and watched the house with a good deal of anxiety.

It was the young man's first visit to the woman he loved since the theft of the papers and his confession to Falcon Flynn.

He said that he would never face Reva again, knowing what he did; but here he was.

She rose to greet him, and in a little while they were seated in the parlor in animated converse.

Of course the one dread subject was up. Hardin Hawley kept the secret of his relationship to Ramon Rolfe, and Reva did not suspect.

She recalled how she had startled Nixon Nox with the exhibition of the ring found on the scene of the sudden death, and she resolved to show it to her lover.

Reva led up to the finding of the ring, and thus prepared him for the denouement.

She rose and crossed the room to a small table that stood in one corner, half-hidden by a drop-curtain.

Hardin watched her eagerly.

"It is here I have kept my find ever since," she said, as she opened a drawer in the stand, but the next moment she stood like one petrified with astonishment.

Hardin Hawley sprang up and went over to her.

"It is gone!" cried Reva.

"When did you see it last?"

"Yesterday."

"And it was here?"

"In this drawer, Hardin. I put it here, for I knew of no safer place for it."

The young man leaned over and inspected the drawer for himself, but no ring rewarded him.

"You have been plundered," said he.

"Aye, but by whom? Who has been here?"

"That is the plunderer's secret."

Reva stood white-faced by the table, her gaze riveted upon the robbed drawer, and for a moment Hardin feared she would succumb.

"Who saw it in your possession?" he asked.

She flushed a little.

"I showed it to Mr. Nox."

"Nixon Nox, Mr. Rolfe's last companion?"

"Yes."

"To no one else, Reva?"

"To no one else. I intended to show it to the detective, and I sent for him, but he was not to be found, and therefore he did not get to see it."

"It is a strange burglary," said Hardin. "It is something for the ferret, and we will see what he can make out of it."

"But he has no clew, unless—"

She stopped of her own volition.

"I don't accuse Mr. Nox," said she, continuing. "I dare not do that, you know."

"Of course not. He was his friend."

"Yes. We must accept his explanations."

Hardin Hawley nodded, but at the same moment looked away.

Once more he peered into the drawer and seemed to see that the robbery had been deftly affected, for nothing else had been disturbed.

"Everything is as I left it here, everything but the ring," asserted Reva.

"Which shows that the thief came for nothing else."

"It must be so."

They went back to the chairs, and Reva for a moment remained silent.

"Now that the ring has vanished, I must recall something else," said she.

"Let us trust that the recollection will prove a clew."

"Last night I heard a noise in the house. It was quite late, but I did not come down-stairs. Indeed, I was half-inclined to the opinion that it was a dream, for I had retired to my room and had fallen asleep. I awoke and lay there a little while listening, but, as I did not hear more, I thought nothing of the occurrence."

"What was it like?"

"Footsteps," said the girl at once. "It seemed to me that they were just outside my chamber, but they sounded like the footsteps of a dream."

"It may have been the thief."

"All the doors were locked as usual this morning," Reva hastened to say.

"No windows up?"

"None. Indeed, Marcie, my maid, was up before I came down, and she said she found the house in its usual condition."

"How long have you had Marcie?"

Reva started.

"Let us stop here. Marcie is above suspicion. She has been with us more than a year."

"We will dismiss her from the case, then. She remained in the house last night?"

"I believe so, though she went out in the early part of the evening."

"To see her friends?"

"Her mother, somewhere in the city."

"Do you know where, Reva?"

"I do not. Shall I call Marcie? She is in now."

"Let it go," said Hardin. "Marcie must be true and faithful. But some one filched the ring, that is certain—the clew found in the Park."

"Some one besides Marcie," said Reva, quickly. "There she comes now. She has the night till ten—I always allow her that."

At this moment the door opened, and the face of a young girl was seen.

"I shall be back at ten, miss," said she, as Hardin caught the smile which the maid threw at her mistress.

"Very well, Marcie. But a moment—is the house all locked?"

"It is."

"Then take the time till ten, Marcie."

Hardin had seen the fair, well-sculptured features of the maid, and had engraved them, as it were, on the tablets of his mind.

The door was closed, and the maid slipped from the house.

"Let us begin here," said Hardin Hawley, as he rose and threw a look toward the door.

"You don't suspect the girl?"

"I will not say suspect, but I have seen her before."

"In this house?"

"Ay, and elsewhere," was the reply. "She has till ten, you say, Reva? Let me have the same time."

"It is yours."

Hardin was on the street.

The maid was still in sight, but the next moment she had flitted round a corner and vanished.

Eager to see what became of her, Hardin Hawley quickened his gait, but did not catch up with her.

Marcie walked fast, as if a little behind time in keeping an appointment, and the young man kept her in sight.

She seemed to fear that she was followed, for she looked over her shoulder every now and then, but did not see the amateur detective.

At last she dodged into a little house, the door of which she found conveniently unlocked, and Hardin Hawley came up to find her out of sight.

He noted the number over the door, and fell back to keep a little watch.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed; then the door opened again.

Marcie came out, but paused on the steps and looked in both directions.

Presently she drew from a pocket in her dress a bit of paper which she crushed in her hand and threw into the gutter.

Then she came down the steps and hurried off.

Hardin Hawley started forward and picked up the crumpled paper, which he held tightly, while he started after Marcie once more.

He resolved to go to the end of his somewhat exciting trail.

Without reading the paper, or even glancing at it, he hastened after Marcie, the maid, and tracked her into a quiet little ladies' saloon, where he saw her order an ice.

Now he had a little time.

He fell back and drew forth the paper.

It was a half-sheet, and the first glance told him that it was a brief letter.

The handwriting was effeminate, and he read it eagerly as follows:

"You can go away now, but don't 'peach.' It is death for you to betray those whom you have served. You are in the toils, and a still tongue is what you need most. Take what is handed you and go."

"SILENCE."

This strange note Hardin Hawley read again and again, or until he had committed every word.

The skein was becoming a little untangled.

Marcie had been some one's tool. She may have taken the ring for that person, and from the writing that person was one of her own sex.

Poor Marcie.

She deserved a better future.

For a little while Hardin Hawley debated what to do.

Should he go back and confront Reva with what he considered evidence of her maid's duplicity?

No; he would fasten the chain of guilt about the girl.

Therefore, he stood aloof where he could watch Marcie, and for some time he did so.

She seemed enjoying herself in the little saloon, and when she came out she started off with a light step.

Once more the young tracker was at her heels.

Would she go back now?

Hardin looked at his watch.

Marcie had nearly two hours to play in, but if she obeyed the letter she would not go back to the Rolfe mansion.

She turned in that direction, and walked some time toward home.

"She's going back," decided the amateur.

But Marcie was only doubling.

If she had a pursuer she would throw him off the track, and Hardin Hawley soon saw that the girl was as shrewd as the shrewdest.

All at once she turned down a street near home and vanished.

Hawley stopped dumfounded.

But the following moment he saw the girl coming toward him.

There was no escape now.

He was full in the light of a lamp and Marcie but a few feet away.

Betrayal was imminent.

Hawley pulled his hat over his brow and kept on.

She was doubling like a hare.

In a few seconds they were face to face and the crisis had arrived.

Marcie did not seem to see him first, and he was congratulating himself on this when she uttered a sudden cry.

He was discovered!

Hawley felt his blood tingle when the maid stopped and looked him squarely in the face. He knew that she had recognized him.

"You've been following me!" cried the girl, whose face was white. "You are no better than your fellow-ferrets."

"Just as you say, Marcie. You've been playing a nice little game with 'Silence.'"

She did not scream, as he half-expected she would; on the contrary, she drew a dagger and struck at him with all the savagery of an insulted Amazon.

But Hawley caught the descending arm in midair; then he saw Marcie tear loose and dart away.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GHOST-LADY.

Hardin Hawley did not follow the maid.

He stood and watched her vanish, and at last turned back, a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth.

He had news for Reva.

While he had no positive proof that the girl had filched the ring from the drawer, he was confident that she had.

Eager to find Falcon Flynn, whom he had not seen since the robbery of the papers—the theft of the documents which told that Reva was not the child of Ramon Rolfe—he resolved to hunt the detective up at once.

Hawley knew nothing of the ferret-sport's adventures in the trap of the Eureka.

He was ignorant of the trail as it had been followed since their meeting by the tracker of Gotham, and was therefore surprised when he reached the ferret's door to read thereon the words "For Rent."

Hawley stared at the placard, unable to fathom the meaning of the sentence as it applied to the man he sought, and he was obliged to turn away without finding the detective.

But a most lucky bit of information fell into his net from a boy whom he encountered on the pavement at the foot of the stairs.

"Lookin' fer Falcon Flynn, eh?" queried the boy.

"I am."

"Are you Hawley?"

"That's my name. He left word for me?"

Still for all this the boy eyed Hawley with a good deal of suspicion, but at last he laid his dirty hand on his arm.

"He's changed roosts," he said, looking up into Hawley's face. "I was to guard the place and see who came after him. He said if you came—he called you Hawley and gave me a description of you which you fit pretty well—to hand you this."

A bit of crumpled paper came from the boy's pocket and Hawley pounced upon it instantly.

He read it at a glance, for it merely gave him an address; and, thanking the boy, he bolted off to find the Falcon.

Hawley reached the new nest as soon as possible, for he was eager to recount his adventures, and when he rang the bell he was ushered into a hall, where he inquired if "Harmon Scott" was in.

"He's your new lodger," said he to the woman, who seemed never to have heard the name before.

"Oh! the man up-stairs, last room back," she said, recalling some recent event. "I can't say. Friend of yours? Go up and see if he's there."

Hawley was only too eager to do this, and in a little while he stood before the designated door.

He turned the knob, but the door was locked, and while he was debating what to do he heard some one coming up the dimly lighted stairs.

Maybe the landlady was coming to assist him?

Hawley happened to glance down, and the moment he caught sight of the figure there he drew back.

It was the figure of a woman, and she wore deep, close-fitting black.

Hawley could see but little of her face for the shadows that prevailed, but the sight threw over him a chill of horror.

His own figure seemed to blend with the shades of the corner into which he had pressed it, and he looked on with overpowering curiosity.

She came to the head of the stairs, did this black-robed woman, and there she stopped.

The amateur detective watched her every movement, and held his breath for fear that to breathe would be to betray him.

She threw a hurried, but a searching look on every side; then she advanced to Falcon Flynn's door.

"You'll find it locked, madam," thought Hawley.

Locked or not, she was prepared to open it, for, after she had stood there a minute the door swung inward and she crossed the threshold.

"She has come to keep an engagement with the Falcon," assumed the watcher. "He has told her of the change of quarters, and maybe she saw the boy at the door."

The woman closed the door softly behind her, and then the lighting of the gas followed her invasion of the room.

The amateur did not care about interfering with this woman's business. His experience with Marcie had not been of the best, and the dagger which the maid wielded might have found his heart but for his alertness.

For half a minute Hawley stood in the corner, waiting for the woman to emerge from the room, but she did not come out.

"It's to be a wait, perhaps," he thought. "She has come to wait for Falcon."

A strange, deeply-seated curiosity took possession of Hawley's mind. Everything was so silent in the room.

He stole forward, and as he did so he saw that the gas went down.

"She's coming out now," and with this he dodged back, but the door did not open.

These proceedings mystified Hawley; he had never seen anything like them, and he wondered if the woman was not a mad creature who had come to the room for the avengement of some fancied wrong.

This thought grew on Hawley and he crept forward to the door again.

Resolved to see all there was to be seen before the light went entirely out, he caught hold of the cross-piece underneath the transom and lifted his body from the floor.

The room lay before him.

He could see every foot of the detective's apartment, but not a sign of the black-robed visitor was visible.

Hawley could not believe his eyes.

He looked again and again before he dropped back, cat-like, to the carpet, and the mystery increased.

What had become of the woman?

"It more than mystifies me," said he, nonplussed the more he thought of it. "She is in there, but where? In the cupboard? It looks too narrow to hold her."

Why not go in and look for her? Why not expose the strange woman and let her know that she would make nothing by hiding with evil intent in the lodgings of the detective?

For Hawley to think was to act.

He opened the door noiselessly and stepped into the room.

The gas was burning with a bluish tip, but he could see the interior of the chamber quite well.

He stopped just beyond the door and got second wind.

He didn't know what sort of a creature he might meet.

The room looked empty sure enough; and he looked in every direction.

Hawley crossed the chamber to the cupboard, a tall, old-fashioned affair, which reached to the ceiling.

He opened the door and looked inside, but no woman rewarded him.

"Not here! She hasn't dissolved into air and vanished in that way. Flesh and blood don't do this."

He made a thorough search of the room, even going so far as to turn down the covers of Falcon Flynn's couch, and looked twice in the corners.

It was a puzzle too great for Hardin Hawley, and an expression of deep chagrin overspread his face when he turned back and sat down.

The woman had vanished as if she had really dissolved into thin air.

He had looked wherever a woman could hide, but she had not been unearthed.

"She must know this house," said he, at last, coming back for the twentieth time to this same conclusion. "She is familiar with these premises. But what brought her here and why did she vanish so quickly? The landlady ought to know."

Hawley was about to quit the room and seek the woman who had admitted him, when he heard a strange sound.

It sounded like a hiss, and he turned and looked toward the couch.

In vain did he strain his eyes to make out anything foreign between him and the wall, for nothing was to be seen but the shadows which had lain there ever since his coming.

"I'll get nervous if I stay," smiled the amateur detective, turning once more to the door and, pulling it open, he bounded into the hall.

But there he turned and looked back.

He had not pulled the portal to entirely; he had left behind him a narrow space, which enabled him to look back into the detective's lodgings.

What did he see?

What was that standing against the wall at the foot of the bed?

Hawley's eyes caught sight of the black figure the moment he looked.

His blood grew hot and he turned to the door, again dashing it open—to lose the woman as before.

Once more with a muttered curse Hardin Hawley stood nonplussed in the ferret's room.

He was again the only person there.

The woman was gone; she had vanished before his very eyes and he could not tell whither.

Hawley crossed the room and began to sound the wall at the foot of the bed.

He struck a match—the gas being low—and by its aid inspected the wall from ceiling to floor.

"What infernal magic is there in this?" he cried. "She vanished here. It was not a ghost, but flesh and blood. She is mistress of some magic and she knows this chamber perhaps better than Falcon Flynn does."

The match went out, but he did not light another.

In another moment he stood once more outside the mystic chamber, but this time he drew his body from the floor and looked down over the transom.

Nothing came into view this time. As if suspicious that his keen eyes were in the neighborhood of the room the mysterious woman did not reveal herself again, and at last Hawley lowered his body and went down-stairs.

He knocked first at one door below and then at another, and at length aroused the sleepy landlady.

"Who came in after I did?" he asked.

The woman appeared to be startled by his question and solemnly shook her head.

"No one."

"But some one—a woman—followed me up-stairs. I saw her enter Harmon Scott's room and—"

"Heavens! you have seen the ghost-lady!" exclaimed the little woman, losing color.

"What! you don't expect me to believe that this house is haunted? Judging from what I've already seen of your nerves, you'd be the last person to inhabit it along with a tenant of that description. Come up-stairs and I'll show you where she vanished."

"Not for my life!" was the answer. "It is an old legend, dating back before my time. Was she tall and dressed in black?"

Hawley had to confess that such was the appearance of the woman he had seen.

"'Tis she!—the ghost-lady!" asserted the little woman. "Don't mention it, please. I have an empty room left and it might hurt my house. And you won't mention it to Mr. Scott? He might vacate, you see."

"You have an eye for business and for nothing else, madam," smiled Hawley. "My word for it, if you watch this door long enough you'll see the ghost-lady emerge from the house. Good-night!"

Hawley, after his strange experience, felt the cool air of night on his face with a thrill of delight.

"I must find and post Falcon Flynn. There is danger—if not death—in that house. The woman in black may be in league with the landlady; but whether this is true or not, she knows that the detective—the man who is unraveling the knot of crime tied in the Park the night Ramon Rolfe died—inhabits that room. She knows that he has changed his quarters for a purpose."

But here arose a terrible dilemma.

Where could he look for Falcon Flynn to warn him of the danger?

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOCTOR AND DETECTIVE.

Falcon Flynn, after his interview with Hylo Jack, was anxious to run Hamish Kent to earth.

The declaration received from Jack that the inventor from Jersey was not where he had been, made the finding of the man somewhat difficult, but he did not despair.

Jack could tell him where he had been, but still asserted that now he was not there.

The detective went to his task with that cheerfulness of spirit which characterized him on all his trails.

The inventor had to be found.

The man who had come to the city from the little workshop in Fernbank was to be run to earth if it took him the rest of the time on the mystery.

In a short time the Falcon turned up in the neighborhood of the place where Hamish Kent had been and approached the house.

Jack had told him a good deal, but not all.

There seemed to be something which Hylo Jack kept back for a purpose and the detective had discovered that this secret, whatever it was, was not to be told.

Flynn did not ring the bell, for Jack had said that no ring would be answered, so he turned the knob, and the door yielded.

Into the house went the trailer of Gotham, and found himself in a narrow hall.

The last workshop of the Jerseyman was on the next floor, and thither the Falcon bent his steps.

The door stood before him.

He pushed it open and stood in a little room which gave forth evidence that it had lately been occupied.

But the bird was gone.

If that place had been tenanted by Hamish Kent, he was not there then, and from all appearances he had not left a clew behind.

An improvised work-bench stood along one of the walls, and the detective went over to it and stood there.

Gone!

This man must have been warned.

Some one must have told him that the ferret would find him there and the inventor—the maker of strange bits of mechanism with steel needles for shafts of death—had pulled out for another hiding place.

Flynn leaned against the bench and took in the room.

The gas jet flickered as a puff of wind came in at a broken pane and threw the detective's shadow against the wall.

In the grate, half filled with burned paper, were to be seen bits of iron filings, and now and then, as the ferret looked sharply, little pieces of wood.

The Falcon went over to this spot and bent downward.

He emptied the grate with a good deal of caution, for grates before that time had furnished him with clews, and he was always ready to inspect them.

But this one seemed unduly stubborn.

The detective saw a tough task before him, and on his knees before the grate he worked as if his life depended on the result.

At last he came toward the table and sat down on the only chair in the room.

He dumped before him the contents of his hand and looked at them.

A lot of filings and bits of charred paper, nothing more; and as the ferret-sport turned them over, pushing them aside, after a good look, he smiled.

In his hand was the point of a bit of steel like a needle, for it had pricked him.

He pulled a little magnifier from his pocket and brought it to bear on the point.

It was barely observable with the naked eyes, but under the lens it looked almost as large as the point of a pencil.

Was this a clew or a confirmation.

The Falcon's mind went back to Doctor Julius and the steel needles in the black case, and he remembered what the chemist-doctor had told him.

So deeply engrossed was the detective that he did not hear the footsteps that came into the room as the door opened noiselessly.

"Still on the hunt?" said a voice.

In an instant Falcon Flynn had looked up, and there in the doorway, his striking face strangely pallid, stood Doctor Julius.

His eyes emitted an unnatural light, and were fastened on the man of trails.

Doctor Julius stood for a moment near the door, and all at once his hand covered the detective.

"You are determined to doom me," said he. "There is to be no sleeping till you've helped me into the grave."

"How so, doctor?" asked Falcon Flynn, a smile coming to his lips for a moment.

"I have intimated how before this. I have pleaded with you, but you will not listen. You have it in for me."

"I am after the guilty. I want to unravel this death knot of the Park—to find the hand that killed Ramon Rolfe."

"Did you expect to find it here?"

"I cannot say. You see what lies before me."

The ferret pointed to the steel point and looked at the doctor-chemist as if he would read his inmost thoughts.

Doctor Julius came forward and his gaze fell upon the bit of shining steel.

"It is but the point. What does it prove?"

"It proves that the man who left this bit of steel in the grate is Hamish Kent."

The doctor-chemist started a little.

"You did not find him here?"

"I did not."

"The nest was empty when you came, eh?"

"He was not in."

"But the grate was full of litter and you went through it—sifted it out to find that point?"

Falcon Flynn bowed.

"It seems that nothing escapes you. You see the smallest things; you go where they are and you find them."

"That is the duty of a detective."

"Just so. That is your business. I'll admit that, but you want to finish me, no matter how much I care to live for a certain purpose. Come, Falcon Flynn, I'll give you the hundred thousand dollars I spoke of before."

"It is useless, doctor."

The tall, dark-faced man at the table turned and looked squarely into the ferret's face.

"Very well. I submit; but let me say this: The end of the trail is death!"

"Death for me, doctor?"

"Death for the man who persists!"

"I intend to persist. Know that from this moment, Doctor Stemway."

There was no reply, but the long, slender hand of Doctor Julius was put out for the needle point.

"No!" cried the detective, grasping his wrist and pulling back the hand. "That belongs to me."

There was a half-suppressed oath on the doctor's part, and the look which the Falcon got at the same moment would have killed him had it been a dagger.

"Keep it, then. But you shall not find Hamish Kent. You may hunt high and low; you may run down all the trails that promise you any clews; but he will never come within reach of your hand. Foolish man! A hundred thousand is certainly better than the end of the trail you are now on."

"You cannot bribe me. This mystery is to be uncovered and the guilty brought to light."

A laugh rippled over Doctor Julius's lips, and he turned away, shaking his sides in the strange cachinnation.

"Is he mad?" asked the detective, as he watched the laughing doctor. "What has turned this man's head?"

Doctor Julius walked to the door and there turned suddenly on the person who watched him.

"To-morrow and to-morrow night!" was all he said.

"Do you mean—"

"To-morrow and to-morrow night!" was the interruption, and the next moment the demon doctor crossed the threshold and the door closed with a snap.

The Falcon was alone.

"He came to see Hamish Kent!" he claimed. "He expected to find the needle-maker here, but he finds him gone. He will hunt him up. He will not rest till he finds him and he may know where to look."

He waited until the doctor-chemist had reached the bottom of the stairway; then he sprang across the room.

The front door closed as he looked down the flight and Detective Flynn was soon going down himself.

"My trail to Hamish Kent lies in keeping Doctor Julius in sight," he thought. "He will lead me to the inventor. He must know something about the new hiding place, for a look of satisfaction came suddenly to his face. He knows."

Down on the street Doctor Julius was not seen, but not far off a figure, bent and wobbly, was noticed by the detective.

Falcon hurried on and overtook the man; he looked into the wrinkled, beggarish face that was suddenly turned sideways to him, and smiled.

"He can't hide his eyes," said he to himself. "Doctor Julius, you must get a better mask than this if you want to deceive me. I know you."

Despite the suddenly changed face the detective had recognized the eyes of Doctor Julius, but he did not betray his discovery.

The bent figure continued to keep in the shadow of the buildings, and was furtively watched by Falcon.

Now and then a shrunken hand was thrust out as some one came by, and on several occasions a little coin fell into it.

Doctor Julius was playing his new role well.

Falcon Flynn continued to watch the man till he reached a corner, which he turned, and thus broke the view.

Around the corner the ferret stopped.

He waited for the doctor, and presently the wobbly footsteps came along.

The open doorway of which the detective had taken possession stood him well in need, for the disguised doctor passed by and vanished around the next corner.

"Now, my fox!" exclaimed the ferret-sport, "we will see what there is in this adventure."

Doctor Julius stood on the curbing waiting for a cab which had been hailed, and the moment it came alongside he sprang in and shut the door.

He leaned forward and put his face close to the glass under the driver's seat.

"Number — Eighth Avenue," said he, falling back into one corner of the cab and chuckling to himself.

Away went the vehicle, and Doctor Julius transformed himself back into his old shape and waited.

It was a long ride.

When the cab stopped the door flew open and he stepped out, while the man on the box looked at him in astonishment.

"You don't go back where I found you, eh?" he said to the cabman.

"I don't have to."

"But I want you to follow the streets back—go back the same way you came. Will you do that, sir?"

"I thought so. Here, take this and go back."

A ten-dollar gold-piece was thrown at the man, and he deftly caught it, while Doctor Julius came toward him.

"You will see a man walking after me—trying to keep track of the cab. You will know him when I tell you what he looks like. He must see you."

"I understand."

"You will stop the moment he hails you. You will tell him that you can take him to number —."

"Yes, sir."

"He wants to see me, that man does. You will get him into the cab and drive him—"

"Here?"

"The devil, no!" cried Doctor Julius. "You may drive to the North Pole or to the infernal regions—anywhere except Eighth Avenue."

"Oh, I see."

"Now go. Find him. He is 'on the trail,' as they say. Don't miss him. Take him a ride—to the river or to the Park. I know the number of your cab. I won't forget you."

The man sprang back upon the box and took up the lines.

"Remember! He is not to be brought here," cried the doctor-chemist. "Take him to the devil, first. There's where a man of his sort belongs, anyway."

The vehicle turned, and the dark-faced man went toward the nearest house.

"Catch me napping, ferret, if you can. Beat Doctor Julius with all your strategy if it's in the deck to do it; but remember that you have lost Hamish Kent—lost him forever!"

By this time the cab was vanishing,

and, with the gold-piece in his pocket, the driver was watching the pedestrians on the street.

He was looking for the man who was expected to hail him, the person so anxious to keep track of his last fare.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TOLLING HIMSELF TO DOOM.

Suddenly there stepped to the curb a man who threw up a hand to the watchful driver of the cab.

"That's him," said cabby, as he pulled toward the stranger, who was Falcon Flynn.

The detective waited on the sidewalk for the cab, and the moment it drew alongside he said:

"You took your last fare, my friend, home, did you?"

"I landed him at the door of his house. Nice, liberal gentleman that."

Flynn looked into the face of the man who was leaning down from the cushions of the seat with a grimace, and suddenly received a stroke of remembrance.

"Why, Johnson, is it you?"

The cab driver started and sat bolt upright. He had as suddenly become as rigid as a statue, and his hands seemed to have shut like vises on the lines.

Falcon Flynn, still looking the fellow through, went forward, till, resting one foot on the hub, he continued:

"You know me, Johnson?"

The stiff man unbent, and with a hasty look around, he said:

"Of course I do. What is it? Nothing this time, I hope."

"Take me where you landed your fare, Johnson!"

The detective spoke in tones of command.

"Truth is, Mr. Flynn, I promised—"

"Yes, I understand. You promised to let the bird have all the wing he wanted, if not to hoodwink me."

"He made it interesting, and I've got married since I saw you last."

"I know that."

Johnson saw the detective open the door of the cab and put his foremost foot on the step.

"We'll settle this fare some other time," said Falcon. "I want to be taken to this gentleman's destination right away!"

"It's in Eighth Avenue, and I daren't drive you to the very house."

"You needn't do that. Within half a block of the number will be sufficient. Now, off we are, Johnson!"

The Falcon settled himself in the easy depths of the cab and recalled how on another occasion, and several years before, he had met the same cab driver while in pursuit of a mystery, and how he had caught him in the toils, but, after using him in the interests of justice, had let him off.

It was simply blind luck that he should now find Johnson, and just when he needed him.

As for Johnson himself, with the ten-dollar gold-piece burning a hole in his pocket, and constantly reminding him of his promise to his other fare, he debated in his vexed mind what to do.

"Make time, Jim," said the voice of the detective in the cab. "I want to find that man."

Johnson dismissed his scruples, and whipped up, taking Falcon Flynn back over the same route, and turning at last into Eighth Avenue.

All at once he leaned over and said:

"It's number —, and I'll drive past it so you can see the house."

"That'll do."

The Falcon put his face against the glass door and kept watch as the cab dashed on.

When Johnson drew up at a corner and waited for his passenger to alight, he smiled to himself.

"Never mind the fare, Mr. Flynn," said he. "You've paid it before to-night."

The detective was on the sidewalk, and was looking up into the driver's face.

"That is between us, Johnson, eh?"

"Certainly."

"The fare who entered No. — is not to know anything about this transaction."

"Of course not, and the man I drove

there ahead of him is to be equally ignorant of it."

"Ah, you took the other man thither, too, did you?"

"Yes, for a double fare."

"With his traps, Johnson?"

"He had a valise, that's all."

"You called for him, did you?"

"Yes."

"How did you get the call?"

"A lady brought it."

"Was she tall and good-looking?"

"She was tall, but the valise wouldn't let me see what she looked like."

"Dressed in black, Johnson?"

"Heavens! I guess you know more about her than I do. She merely came to my stand and told me to call for a gentleman who wanted to take a ride."

"And as a matter of business you called?"

"That's what I drive for."

"Of course. Had a valise, did he? Came down-stairs when you rang the bell to tell him that you had come."

"By Jove! he did come down stairs. I remember hearing him. He clung to the valise as if he held the Koolinoor. And the moment we reached No. — Eighth Avenue he vanished like a meteor."

Falcon Flynn, the ferret-sport, was satisfied that he had found the trail.

"All right, Johnson. Good-night. Give my respects to Mrs. J—, who used to be Fanny Fenner. I know all about your marriage."

With a look of astonishment at the ferret the cabman turned and drove off.

Falcon went back toward the proper number and looked at the house.

He knew who was in there at that very moment, and did not doubt that he had run Hamish Kent down.

It was a two-story brick house, very plain and very old.

The front door was an old-fashioned affair, and stood a little way from the steps in a sort of vestibule.

There was a brass knob on this portal, and Falcon looked closer, to see that it was a trifle awry.

The shutters of the quiet house were closed, but for all this the keen-eyed detective could catch a glimmer of light beyond them.

He stole forward and stopped a second under one of the windows.

Sounds of voices came to his ears, but the words were incoherent, and for once he was baffled.

There seemed but one thing to be done, and that was to withdraw and watch the house.

The doctor-chemist would not remain there always.

Detective Flynn slipped down the street and took his station in a convenient doorway, from which he could see the front of the two-story brick.

Not for the briefest space of time did he remove his gaze from the opposite house.

As the light of the nearest lamp fell directly upon it, he could see the door without any trouble, and he kept up his vigils till it opened.

It opened, did this door, to let a man out—Doctor Julius.

There was no mistaking the step nor the figure which emerged from the house.

The Falcon knew the man.

He saw Doctor Julius betake himself off while he moved down the walk to the nearest corner, where he crossed.

Hamish Kent, the missing man—the maker of the deadly steel needles—was over in that house!

There was no mistaking this, and the detective would have wagered his head that he had as good as found the person sought by Manta, the girl from Fernbank.

He let Doctor Julius vanish without setting himself upon his trail.

"Now, Mr. Kent," said the detective, with a smile, "I'll surprise you just a trifle."

With the cunning of the street fox the man of many clues gained the two-story brick and mounted the steps.

Light still shone beyond the shutters attached to the lower windows, and the detective fancied that he could see the inventor at work.

He laid his hand on the brass knob.

It grated a little, but turned, but the door would not open.

He would have to ring, but, look as he might, there was no knocker, the house never having been supplied with the modern door-bell.

But the Falcon Detective was not to be beaten.

He knocked and waited.

In another moment the lights in the front room went out, and then he heard some one approaching the door.

"Hamish Kent is coming in person to answer the summons," said the ferret-sport. "Now there will be a surprise."

He made ready to enter the moment the door was opened, and when the lock clicked he leaned forward.

Falcon Flynn sprang into the hall, forcing the door a little wider as it opened, and then he heard a cry.

"What do you want?" cried a voice.

At the same time a man stepped forward and threw out his arms toward the ferret.

"I want to talk to you."

The man seemed to take a long breath.

"You want to see me, do you? Well, come into the parlor."

He marched toward a door while Falcon looked at him and saw how supple and wiry were both step and figure.

This was Hamish Kent, found at last—the man who, in all probability, could tell more about the death of Ramon Rolfe than any other living person.

The detective followed him into the parlor, which suddenly became ablaze with light, and the supple man walked over to a table in the middle of the room.

"You want to see me, you say?" and he turned suddenly upon the detective. "Do you know who I am?"

"If I did not I would not be here. You are Hamish Kent, of Fernbank."

A perceptible tremor quavered the man's facial muscles, and the hand at his right side came up and rested on a little box on the table.

"You say I am Hamish Kent, and you want to talk with me. You must be a detective."

"I am."

"I thought so!" cried the other. "You have come to the door of death. My right hand rests on my latest triumph in mechanism. I have but to press upon this box, and, presto, you are dead!"

CHAPTER XXV.

DETECTIVE AND HUNTED MAN.

Hamish Kent spoke with an emphasis which told that he was terribly in earnest.

"Presto! you are dead, I say!" he repeated, after a moment's pause. "This box holds imprisoned in its depths a shaft that kills the moment it is released."

"Like the shaft which found the heart of Ramon Rolfe?"

There was no start on the Jerseyman's part; he merely looked as coolly as ever at his visitor, and the next moment let his gaze drop to the box again.

"I am Hamish Kent," said he. "You have found me after a long hunt. Now, what do you want?"

The detective thought rapidly.

"You have been betrayed."

"Betrayed?" echoed Hamish Kent.

"Why not? All friends are not true ones. You may have an enemy who has served you in wolf's clothing."

"Come, this won't do," the other laughed. "You are trying to prejudice me against my friends. You can't do that."

"Believe that all are true to you, then," half-indifferently answered the ferret-sport. "You don't seem to have questioned the real motive of those whom you have served."

"You cannot array me against them. You have a certain duty to perform in the interest of what you call justice."

"That is true, Hamish Kent."

"You are the tiger on the trail—in other words, the human bloodhound or man-hunter."

"That is as true as the other declaration."

"Yet you stand there with as much coolness as I ever saw displayed by any

man. I hold your life in my hands. Were you to look into this little box you would see a lot of springs and wheels which to your unscientific mind would tell nothing, but to me they mean death. I cannot afford to spare you."

"No," said Falcon Flynn; "in one sense you cannot afford to let me quit the house alive; but you should first think of the betrayal."

"Prove that!" cried Hamish Kent, his hand trembling on the lid of the box as he spoke. "Prove to me that I have been betrayed or that they intend to play false with me, and I will spare you."

"I cannot prove it here."

"Of course! That's your game. You want to get out of this house; you want to get to the end of the tether, and then I will hear from you in another way."

"You dare not trust me, Hamish Kent."

"I'd as soon trust the black rattler fresh from the mountains."

"Then you may press the button."

The very coolness of the detective drew from the inventor a smile of admiration.

His countenance relaxed a little.

"Why don't you press the button and let them betray you without mercy?"

The hand left the box, and the man came round the table walking toward Falcon Flynn, whom he seemed to transfix with his eager gaze.

"By Jove! If I thought they were aiming to do this they would receive a stroke that would paralyze the whole gang!" hissed he. "I would turn on them the batteries of ingenuity and death and there would be other subjects for the coroner."

The Falcon said nothing, for things seemed to have taken a turn in his favor.

"Do you mean the doctor," asked Hamish Kent, motioning the detective to a chair, while he leaned against the table and folded his arms.

"Why not?"

"Say that you mean him. Make the accusation plain and aboveboard. Tell me, if you dare, that Doctor Julius means to play with me as a cat plays with the mouse—"

"Or as the serpent toys with the dove which finally is crushed by its folds."

The inventor took a long breath.

"How did you come to find me?" he suddenly asked.

"Perhaps the doctor helped me."

"You mean that you watched the doctor. You were at his heels. Is that it?"

"I was not at his heels. I had no occasion to follow him. He sent me a pilot."

Every vestige of color left Kent's face, and for half a minute he stood like a statue at the table and looked at the man before him.

"I don't believe you can prove that," he said, at last. "It is a bold charge. It is your best card—in fact, you can play no other in this situation."

This was true, but the detective, playing for the highest stake in any game—his life—did not lose his nerve.

He looked at the man standing with folded arms at the table, and saw the darkish face which Manta had so accurately described, and the deep-set, keen eyes, full of genius.

He saw, too, the strong arms and the abundance of muscle, which denoted immense powers of body, and noted that the hands were long, flexible, and suggestive.

He waited for the man to speak again, which he did after a brief pause.

"How does the girl look?" was the unexpected question.

"Do you mean Manta?"

"Of course. Who else would I refer to?"

"There is another young lady who enters into this matter."

"Oh, yes, I remember," with a wave of the hand. "I almost forgot her, but I meant Manta."

"The girl is well and anxious."

"How anxious?"

"About you, of course."

"They tell me that she has found an asylum with Mother Iron-Hand. Is that true?"

"You must be kept informed of events as they occur."

"I hear of some of them. Look here. Would you mind it to let her see me?"

"She came to New York to hunt you, Manta did. She came hither to find out what had become of you, and she is as anxious on your behalf as you are yourself."

A faint smile came to the inventor's lips.

"She wants to see me, does she? She may want to help run me down for you—a detective."

"Manta is anxious to learn a little secret which you hold. She has told me this."

"Yes, yes. I have a secret which is all my own, but I prefer to keep it."

"You don't intend to relieve the mind of this poor girl, but, on the contrary, you will let her live on, a human enigma to herself, never learning the truth about her ancestry."

"I will let her live on in darkness so far as that is concerned, unless, as you have said, they betray me. Then—"

His hands fell at his sides and shut there.

"Then," he finished, "let the traitors beware. I am Hamish Kent! I have no pride of ancestry like some people, for I can go back in my family line and find not one who ever made his mark in the world. I am a self-made man. I came into the world with no gold spoon in my mouth, but still I am a power. I carry in my brain the secret of death and the power that kills."

"You have been looking for me ever since Manta came to the city. You have been first on this trail and on that. You have followed up promising clues, to be beaten in the end, but now for the first time you stand face to face with your quarry, Hamish Kent!"

He talked as if it gave him secret delight to monopolize the conversation.

He took a step toward the detective, and then fell back as suddenly.

Once more his hand went back to the lid of the little box on the table, and he looked in Falcon Flynn's face.

"What will you do if I let you go?" he asked.

"Ferret out the guilty."

"You can't be driven from this trail?"

"Only by death."

"A brave man like you, Falcon Flynn, ought not to perish like a dog."

"I am in your power if there is death in that box."

The gaze of the ferret-sport fell to the box and rested there. He eyed it calmly, for there was nothing else to do, and at last he threw out his hand and covered it.

"Is that the needle battery, Kent?" he queried.

The man threw back his head and broke out into a laugh.

"The needle battery? Now, there is a new name for it—one which I never thought of!" cried the Jerseyman. "You have heard of the needle, then?"

"Who has not? Don't you know that I am not the only one who has heard of your terrible powers?"

"That may be true. But, come up here!"

The lid of the box was slid off and the detective stepped forward.

"This is, as I told you, a jumble of little springs, and even when the lid is off it looks harmless as clockwork. But there is death in here."

The Falcon looked down into the box, half-filled with strange mechanism, and tried to make out its workmanship.

"Shut, it looks like one of those latter-day cameras," said the Jerseyman. "I could parade Broadway with it under my arm and be mistaken for a kodak fiend," and he smiled. "But it is not camera unless you call it a camera of death, for it takes a likeness of its victim as he falls."

"Did it take a likeness of the man in the carriage in the Park?" asked the ferret-sport.

"This box was not there, if you mean the death of Ramon Rolfe."

"I referred to that event."

"I thought so. This box, I say, was not there. It is not the box of the needle. Let me show you that it is not."

He dived one of his long, dark hands into the box and brought up a brass tube, one end of which he struck on the table.

Instantly there fell out a little disk of metal, silver in its whiteness, and almost square in shape.

"I see! You have exchanged the needle for the disk, which, no doubt, is just as deadly."

"And it possesses this advantage. In a minute after penetrating a body, the disk dissolves, and I defy science, with all its gifts, to find a trace of it. It would baffle such a learned man as my friend, Doctor Julius."

"Ah! and since we are back to the doctor," observed the Falcon, looking up in Kent's face, "don't you see that he betrayed you when he showed me the steel needle found in the body of the victim of the Park crime?"

"It looks that way, but he would not do it now."

"That is true."

"Didn't he want you to step from the trail?"

"He did. I could have sold my secrets for one hundred thousand dollars."

"But you would not?"

"I am in this battle to bring the dark into the light, not for money."

"In other words, to find who killed Ramon Rolfe?"

"That is it."

"Do you think you know?"

Once more the man stood against the table, with his arms folded on his broad chest.

"Do you think you know, Falcon Flynn?" he repeated.

"I will answer that question some other time."

"I want an answer now!"

There was no reply.

Suddenly the inventor struck the box and knocked it from the table.

"There! I am disarmed now!" cried he. "I stand on an equal footing with you."

Now, answer my question: Do you think you know who killed Ramon Rolfe?"

"I think I know."

"You may know, but I do not. I only know how he died!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BROTHER TURNS UP.

Hardin Hawley did not find the Falcon.

The young man, whom we left in pursuit of the Flash Detective, to warn him of the woman in black, whom he had seen enter his new lodgings, was destined to be baffled, no matter where he looked.

Hardin was sure the "ghost lady" was not a ghost at all, but a dangerous person, and that she was ready to step from the secret door and deal a death blow, perhaps, in the dark.

He stopped at last, but not until he had looked for Falcon Flynn till nearly daylight.

He could not find the detective, and at last, much against his inclinations, he went home.

Late in the morning he awoke and went to the window.

The bright light that seemed to come from the bay was showing off the street and its moving life, and he discovered a man walking up and down on the opposite side of the street, and now and then casting furtive glances at the little house.

Hawley dressed, and prepared to see more of this man.

In a few minutes, having left his lodgings by the rear door, he came up behind the watcher, who, with a quick stare, started off.

Hawley followed, keeping at a respectful distance, but all the time studying the man as best he could.

Suddenly the person shadowed turned abruptly and entered a little restaurant.

Hawley waited until he thought the man had taken possession of one of the private stalls, when he himself entered, to find his quarry waiting for him.

"I thought you'd come," said the man, who was about thirty, with a thin, cadaverous face, whose upper lip was covered with a dark mustache. "You were bound to see what became of me, and I don't blame you, for you caught me at my post."

"I did. You were watching my house." The other person laughed.

"I would like to know who has a better right to keep track of you? I know you. You are not Hardin Hawley."

The detective flushed a little.

"Never mind that. I have a certain right to the name, and it suits me well enough, now."

"Perhaps. No one, I suppose, knows that you are Ramon Rolfe's brother?"

"You seem to," retorted Hardin, coolly.

"Of course I do. You don't look much like him, though."

"Perhaps not."

"You had a little adventure last night, hadn't you?"

Hawley, as we shall call him, did not reply.

"Come. You must not think I don't know anything. You followed the girl Marcie a little too far. You almost got the knife for your pains, for she is as quick-tempered as a Comanche."

"She struck with emphasis," smiled the young man.

"Perhaps she had a right to. What right had you to follow her from pillar to post? She didn't kill any one."

"I know that, but—"

"Oh, you thought you had the ring, eh?"

"What ring?"

The other man started and changed color.

"I beg pardon. You want me to tell you who I am. You really thought Marcie had the missing ring."

"I did not," said Hawley, quickly. "I only thought that perhaps Marcie had been made a tool of."

"Oh, is that it? Made a tool of? Whose tool, please?"

The young man resolved to make things plain.

"The tool of one who was concerned in the disappearance of that ring."

"Marcie took the ring. You are right that far. She took it at the bidding of another. She has confessed to me."

"Which is more than she would have told me," replied Hawley, with a smile. "Marcie did not go home last night."

"You mean to her mistress Reva's? No; she did not go back there, and you can go and tell Miss Rolfe that she has seen the last of Marcie Clark."

"I thought as much. After what took place last night I did not expect to hear of her going back. She could not go and face Miss Reva with a clear conscience."

"Exactly what I told her. Marcie is the dupe of a woman who has netted her for a purpose. You may have had some dealings with women in your time, Mr. Hawley, but never with a creature as cool as the one into whose snares Marcie fell."

"You are Marcie's friend?"

"I am, and I am proud of it. The girl isn't bad at heart, but if you knew the whole story you would not accuse her of evil. Won't you have a breakfast with me?"

Hawley had not breakfasted, and told the man he would take his meal where they were.

"I stumbled onto you several times last night," continued the stranger. "You must have been looking for some one."

"I was. I was trying to find the detective."

"For the purpose of giving poor Marcie trouble?"

"No; I wanted to tell him about the enemy in his room."

"An ambush, eh?"

"It looked like it."

"Where is that room?"

Hawley freely gave the proper address, and the other made a mental note of it.

In the midst of another sentence the stranger suddenly stopped, and, throwing a hand across the table, placed it on Hawley's arm.

"You recognize the voice out there?" he asked.

They had taken a stall, and were not to be seen by any one outside.

Hawley listened a moment and then shook his head.

"They've dropped into the stall next to us, which may be providential," continued

the other. "I knew the voice the moment I heard it. I've heard it before, but not here."

There was a noise of moving chairs in the adjoining stall, and the two men listened a moment.

A murmur of tones came to their ears, but the people in the next stall seemed to be carrying on an important conversation in low and confidential tones.

"It's the voice of as sleek a rascal as ever swindled his fellow-creatures," said the man with Hawley. "They call him the manager of the Eureka Investment Company, but one Nixon Nox, a young city sharp and man-about-town is the head of the concern."

"Is it Hyllo Jack?"

"No; but Deuce O'Diamonds is in the next stall, and, if I'm not mistaken in regard to his companion, the master is there, too."

"Nixon Nox?"

"None other. Now the meeting of these two rascals at this place may have been chance, but it doesn't look that way to me. Wait! Rattle your plate a little. There. That stops them, but it gives me a chance. Would you mind slipping out and paying the bill, as if you were the only man in the stall?"

Hawley was ready for anything, and did as was suggested.

Left alone in the stall, the man with the thin face leaned against the wall, to which he glued his ear, and then seemed to hold his breath.

Once or twice his countenance changed, but his eye carried the same old light of eagerness and he listened with diligence until Nixon Nox and his friend decamped.

"Come," said the stranger to Hawley, who met him on the sidewalk. "We haven't a moment to lose. They're going to explode the mine."

"What mine?"

"Follow me and see."

Hawley kept alongside his companion, wondering at times if all this was not a futile venture, but at last he was led into a house and up a flight of steps.

"My name is Clark," said the stranger.

"Marcie's relative?"

"Her brother," was the terse answer. "Marcie stole the ring for a woman. I am going to get it back for the police."

"How?"

"I shall go to the woman who has it and demand it."

"Do you know where she is?"

"I do. Marcie told me."

"You know where that ring was found, and by whom?"

"I do; in the Park where Ramon Rolfe died, and was found by Reva herself."

"Exactly."

"It's something that will do the detectives a great deal of good. Moreover, I can tell them something about that woman. I know a little about her."

"I'm glad I encountered you."

"That's all right. While I watched your house, waiting for you to come out, I felt my blood get hot, for you tracked Marcie last night and overhauled her."

"I shall ask Marcie's pardon the first time I see her."

The other laughed a little and crossed the room to a dresser in one corner.

Suddenly he turned on Hawley and said:

"Do you think the ghost-lady is still in the detective's room?"

"I cannot say."

"He may have dropped in. He may have come back while you were looking for him, and if she was there there may be another mystery for the police. You remember how Falcon Flynn found Tom Havershaw, the detective, dead in Nixon Nox's room?"

Hawley nodded.

"Flynn told me all about that."

"Well, there may have been another tragedy similar, but not in that same room."

"Shall we go and see?"

"I'll go," was the reply.

The man unlocked the dresser and took out several suits, which he looked over, selecting one which, when assumed, gave him another and quite a different appearance.

"You know how to assume disguises," remarked the amateur.

"I have had a little experience in my time, yet I am no detective, either. You can wait for me here, or, if you like, you can go to within a block of the house."

Hawley preferred the latter, and they left the place together.

"What if you find her there?" he asked, as they went down the stairs.

"Leave that to me."

"Remember that she belongs to the police. Flynn more than suspects her."

"Of what? Murder?"

"Yes."

"But what if the Falcon is as dead as Havershaw? Suspects her, does he? We'll see."

No more was said, and when they had gained a spot near the house where Hawley had had his adventure with the "ghost-lady," they separated, and Hawley remained behind.

Minutes were hours to him.

He saw the man run up the steps and pull the bell.

When he vanished inside he actually held his breath, and could not stand still.

Five minutes elapsed before the door opened again, when Hawley, to his joy, saw the strange man emerge from the house.

"I've searched the upper rooms," explained Clark, as he came up. "I've sounded every wall, and have looked over every inch of surface between floor and ceiling."

"Well?"

"No trace of the woman in black! You're sure you weren't dreaming, Mr. Hawley?"

"I was as wide awake as I am at this moment."

"Then we will find her at home."

"Why, man," cried the amateur ferret, starting, "you must know this woman, thoroughly!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HAND NIXON NOX PLAYED.

Having found Hamish Kent, Falcon Flynn turned to other matters.

He was still unconvinced in regard to a certain statement which the inventor had made, to the effect that he did not know who killed Ramon Rolfe, for the detective was inclined to the opinion that the man from Fernbank could, if he would, throw a good deal of light upon that which was dark.

Hamish was left to himself after exacting a pledge from him that he would not change his quarters again unless he informed the ferret of the change; and he even agreed that Manta might come and see him.

The Flash Detective went homeward and just missed seeing the man who called himself Marcie's brother.

He found the little room in the new quarters as he had left it, and if the "ghost-lady" was in ambush, she did not play out her hand.

But the hour of danger was near, for all this, and the detective was soon to meet the enemy most to be feared.

"What are you going to do?" asked a woman who reclined on a sofa in a luxurious room, and turned her eyes upon a man who smoked at a table near by.

There was no reply for a moment, and smoke rings soared toward the ceiling.

"Go and play the great hand at once. There must be an end to all this. You must show your hand and reap the harvest."

"To-day, Stella?"

"Now or never! This man is out of the trap. I know that, for I have had evidence of it. He did not die in the pit at the home of the Eureka, and you promised me that he would never quit the house alive. You hold the papers which your man stole from Hardin Hawley. You know that Reva is not the child of Ramon Rolfe. What if those papers are, in turn, taken from you? What if they fall into the hands of this ferret?"

"You understand," continued Stella, "that Doctor Julius has given the detective a clew. You know that he showed

him the steel dart found in the body of Ramon Rolfe."

"I know that, and it was your duty to prevent this exhibition."

The woman's eyes seemed to flash, and she sat up, looking at Nixon Nox with rage.

"There! don't censure," she cried. "What have you not done? You said that the pit was deep enough to hold this man of the trail—that the button in the floor was in excellent working condition, and that when Deuce O'Diamonds, as you call him, pressed it, the ferret detective would descend into the abode of death and darkness and trouble us no more."

"Once in a while the best of us fail," said he, turning to the matches. "You know that, Stella."

"What if this man should find Hamish Kent?"

"Well, what of it?"

"He might arm himself in a manner that would not be good for us."

"And one of those little darts which the inventor keeps on hand at all times might find his heart and give the police another mystery."

"Little chance of that if the Falcon steals a march on Hamish. He is liable to do that, for he is shrewd and cool-headed."

"I know that."

"Pull yourself together and play out the hand at once. No time is to be lost. Before to-night you must be the betrothed of Reva Rolfe."

"You fix things up like a female Warwick."

"Do I? Well, don't you see that the turning point of the game has been reached?"

"I confess that it looks that way."

"It is here," and the hand of the woman in black came down on the sofa with sudden emphasis. "Before to-night you must be her intended husband or the prize escapes us; the fortune will vanish or fall into the hands of Hardin Hawley, so-called."

"Never that after all my work!" exclaimed Nox, starting a little.

"Then go! Go at once. After the betrothal we will strike with a vengeance. We can win the game yet. I will strike with all my power."

He rose and crossed the room, throwing his cigar into the spittoon.

"What if she refuses?" he asked.

"You must see to it that she does nothing of the kind. Reva is sensitive. You must play the great hand. You hold the cards that will win, no matter how reluctant she is. She shrinks from publicity. You must hold the club over her head. Remember! You can blight her future by threatening to expose the life of Ramon Rolfe, as we have mapped it out."

Nixon smiled and pulled at the ends of his mustache.

"No one knows that I am here," continued Stella. "I waited for the detective, but he did not return. I had to come away; but I know where to find him."

He gave her another look and went to the door.

"In the shadow of a fortune or the rope!" murmured Stella, under her breath, as her gaze followed him. "I would not tell him that for the world, just now; but he may realize it by and by."

"Good-morning, Stella," the sharp called out, as he opened the door. "You will see me come back triumphant or not at all."

With this he closed the door and left her alone in the parlor.

A few minutes later he mounted the steps of the Rolfe mansion and was admitted.

Reva came down shortly after and they met in the room where they had met before.

The face of the young girl was thin and pale, but her eyes were full of a certain eagerness which the manager of the plot could not fathom.

He had come to play out the deadly hand which promised success.

Already he felt that the girl was in the toils, and that the wealth of Ramon Rolfe was to be had for the winning.

Nixon Nox looked toward the door and saw that it was closed.

He wondered if Marcie, the maid, was within hearing distance, and if he and Reva were entirely alone.

"I have met with a misfortune," said the fair girl. "I have lost the clew found in the Park."

He affected to start violently.

"Lost it?" he exclaimed. "Did you take it from the house to exhibit it to the detective?"

"It was taken from me in the house. It vanished one night and all traces have been lost."

"After all, it might have been no clew. Many people, you know, frequent the parks, and some person not at all connected with the death of Ramon may have dropped it."

"I would like to hope so," was the answer. "I wish I could believe this, for as it was a lady's ring, I do not care to accuse one of my sex with having been connected with that tragedy."

"It may turn up. But you should not live here alone. If, as you fear, it was murder, might not the assassin come back for another victim?"

"There is no telling what the motive was. I never knew that my father had an enemy in the world."

Nixon Nox believed that the moment had come.

He came over to where the girl sat and bent over her.

"Let me protect you from the seen and unseen," said he, in low, measured tones. "Let me become the friend who can help you against the secret foes who may surround you."

"You, Mr. Nox?"

"Me, Ramon's friend, the one who was with him when he felt the death shock."

The face which flushed a little grew white and her gaze seemed to transfix him with a stare.

"You must understand me," he went on. "I will defend you against the world. I will stand between you and the hand which you believe was lifted against Ramon with deadly effect, but can only do this as your husband. As my wife, Miss Reva—as the wife of Nixon Nox—you will find that security which no one can disturb—"

A sudden gesture interrupted him and he held his breath.

"Then I shall still want a protector!" she said. "I cannot become your wife."

Nixon thought of the woman waiting for him in his own house and his lips met sternly.

"Think before you repeat that declaration," he said. "Do not blight your life and cast stigma upon the dead."

"A stigma upon the dead?"

"Ay, for even that can be. Ramon Rolfe had a past which might not bear the closest scrutiny."

She started.

"I cannot believe that! I will not believe that he was guilty of any deed which will not bear the full light of investigation."

"Then become my wife and never know that he really was not the man whom you loved."

She drew back and looked startlingly at him while he prepared another arrow.

"You must tell me all—all that you know or have heard of Ramon Rolfe," she demanded. "I must know everything. The accusations at which you hint have no terrors for me, for I am not his child, although his heir."

"His heir?" laughed Nixon Nox. "Poor girl! you are very much in the dark. His heir!"

"Do you insinuate that there is one who stands closer to him than I do?"

He only smiled again, but did not speak.

All at once Reva crossed the room and locked the door, taking out the key and coming back to him.

The city sharp saw this movement and wondered what it meant.

She stopped in front of him and then for a minute looked down into his face.

"The truth, or you remain here till I open the door," said Reva. "There have been too many secrets in this affair already. I say again that I will never become your wife, not only because you are the real head of the Eureka Investment Company, which numbers its dupes by the hundred, but also because you are a blackleg and an infamous plotter."

She was very cool and calm, and the man on the chair began to wish that he had not played the hand quite so full.

"Come now," continued Reva; "tell me who this heir is!"

He gave her a defiant look, his last card of coolness, for, truth to tell, he was fast breaking down despite his professed cleverness at such things, and he wished he had not come to the dead man's mansion.

"You have lied!" asserted the girl, when she had waited on him for a minute. "It was only a game of deep bluff, as you men say. Ramon Rolfe once threw out a hint that he had a brother, but that that relative was dead. If he is not dead—if he will come forward he shall have all that belongs to him, for I will be the last person in the world to take from the living that which is not properly mine. Unless you tell the truth, with proofs that it is such, I shall believe that you have hatched up a plot for a purpose."

"Wait and see," said Nixon Nox. "I can defend you against those who plot against you. I can defend to the bitter end the rightful claims of my wife—"

"There! don't mention that in my presence again. Not as your wife will I ever call upon you for help."

"It is over, then. Wait and see the blow fall. It will come, girl. It will crush you beneath its weight and you will long for the rescuing hand of Nixon Nox."

"The door is locked, sir," calmly informed Reva, with a smile. "I have the key in my pocket. You need not depart yet. If you will be seated I will introduce you to a friend."

He threw a quick glance around the room, but could see no one save the fair Reva.

She stood in the middle of the parlor with the pose of a queen of tragedy, and he actually feared her.

"The friend is here," continued the tall, fair girl, advancing toward a velvet curtain that hung in front of one corner. "You may want to explain a certain little matter with him. Nixon Nox, this is the detective whose hand is already on the button of revelation."

With the words Reva's hand drew the heavy folds aside and there stepped forth from the corner the ferret-sport of Gotham—Falcon Flynn, the sure-handed!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FERRET FINDS HIS MATCH.

Confronted by the detective, Nixon Nox did not quail.

His old courage seemed to have come back to him at the moment of direst peril.

"What means this?" he demanded, turning upon Reva, who watched the play of light and shadow on his face.

"Ask that man," said she, pointing to the ferret-sport, who stood where he had halted after stepping from behind the curtain.

"I will ask, and he shall tell me," was the answer, and the plotter advanced toward the detective.

"You have been concealed behind the arras. You have overheard all that has passed between Miss Reva and myself. You are Falcon Flynn, a detective, and your mission, I have learned, is the unraveling of the Park mystery. You have tracked me, time and again, just as though my hand had sent Ramon Rolfe into the presence of his Maker. Now tell me what proof you have against me."

He spoke with a firm voice, did Nixon Nox, and Reva, with bated breath, looked at the Falcon, wondering how he would meet these words.

The two men stood face to face, scarcely a yard of space separated them, and they were equally matched when it came to a question of strength.

"I will go," said Reva to the detective. "This interview I feel is not for me."

Falcon Flynn was about to let the girl go, when the hand of the city sharp came up and he exclaimed:

"Let her remain!" he commanded.

The detective nodded toward Reva, and the dead man's ward dropped into an arm-chair.

Nox, after eyeing his antagonist a moment, said with asperity:

"This is the way you ambush men. This is one of your shrewd plays, is it?"

"I came thither, not to lie in wait for you, but to see Miss Reva. Your coming was but another chapter in the game, and I preferred to see you here before you went away."

"What have you against me?"

"You will confess nothing. You will deny, no matter what I might say."

"That is still untried."

"You say you were Ramon Rolfe's friend?"

"He would tell you so, if the dead could speak."

"You were his companion on that last and fatal ride?"

"That has been published to the world."

"He went riding that night by your invitation?"

"That is quite true, sir. I wanted to see him on important business and suggested the Park. But that is to be found in the coroner's report."

The detective nodded.

"You came out of the Park at eight o'clock. You reached the main entrance when the bolt came."

"The death bolt? That is right. I see you have studied the evidence to a purpose."

He was getting cooler all the time; he was playing as bold a hand as ever any one played.

The Falcon threw a glance at Reva, in the chair, and seemed to study her face a moment.

"Would you care to go for a little while?" he asked, lowering his voice a trifle.

"Let her stay. I have nothing to conceal," asserted Nixon Nox.

"I shall go if Mr. Flynn wishes it," answered the girl.

"I wish it."

Reva rose, and with a glance toward the two men standing like gladiators confronting each other, passed from the parlor, shutting the door carefully behind her.

Falcon waited half a minute before he spoke again.

"As you must suspect, I sent the young lady away for a purpose," he remarked.

"I did not care whether she went or remained. You seem to believe that you have a powerful arrow in your quiver."

"I make no boasts. You are ready to hear me out?"

"I am ready."

The sharp seemed to pale, but his face remained as immobile as ever.

"You had a friend in the Park that night," intimated the ferret-sport.

"I may have had a dozen. I am not friendless in this city."

"You sent ahead of you a friend, who waited for you to reach the main entrance at eight o'clock?"

"Indeed? You must have been very diligent in the picking up of clues."

"That friend came to the spot a little ahead of time."

"Go on."

"You stopped a moment at the drinking fountain near the gate and talked with Ramon Rolfe there."

"We stopped there. That, I believe, is not in the coroner's report."

"It is not," assured the Falcon. "It is not there because you did not speak of it, and because the person you saw there was not summoned at the investigation."

"But you have discovered that witness?"

"I have found him."

"And he has told you of our little stop at the fountain?"

"Yes."

"Now," said Nixon Nox, bending forward a little, "according to this witness and your theory, the stop brought us to the gate at what time, pray?"

"At five minutes of eight, or five minutes ahead of time."

"Really, I don't see what you are trying to prove when you assert that I was expected at the gate of the Park at eight o'clock."

"It is strange. Think of the note you received the day of the crime."

There was a start on the city sharp's part, but he did not quail.

"What note?" he asked.

"You forget, then, that you received a note, brief, but to the point—a note written on pinkish paper with a water-mark of two crossed daggers."

"I must confess that I never inspect my friends' stationery for water-marks. I leave that for you detectives."

The speaker's lip curled derisively, and for a moment his eyes seemed to flash, but their ire as suddenly faded.

"The note asked you to be at the gate of the Park at eight, sharp."

"Well?"

"You threw that note into the grate—but not into your own."

"Is all this true? Really, Falcon Flynn, you seem to be spinning a fanciful story for my delectation."

"It is not all fancy. The note proves that it is a fact. You tore up that note and threw it into the grate in that room piecemeal. You should have burned it."

The man was getting a little nervous, but the detective did not stop.

"This note came from the person who waited for you in the Park at the main gate," said he.

"Prove it!"

The right hand of the Falcon sought one of his pockets, and was withdrawn with something folded between thumb and finger.

"The note is here," said he, looking sharply at Nixon Nox.

"I don't care for the note," was the haughty reply. "Don't you know that you haven't anything, as yet, against me? That note is nothing, absolutely nothing. It would not hang anybody. What I want to know is—who met us in the Park?"

The detective leaned forward.

"She met you in the Park," said he. "The woman in black called Stella waited for you at the main gate."

"Stella? I don't know Stella."

The man of many clues, expecting this denial, received the rebuff with his usual calmness and studied the face of the cornered man.

"You don't know Stella Starr, the wife of Doctor Julius?" he asked.

"I don't."

"But you know the doctor?"

"I have heard of such a person. I know that he helped at the coroner's investigation."

"Yes, Doctor Julius, the husband of Stella Starr," was the reply. "She sent the note which you tore up in Hamish Kent's retreat and threw into his grate."

Nixon Nox moved one hand across his brow in a thoughtful mood.

"Hamish Kent?" said he. "You deal in strange names, Mr. Flynn."

The detective let a faint smile come to his lips and linger there a little while.

"A truce to this," cried the city sharp. "Why all this inquisition?"

"You can check all of it."

"By saying that all you profess to have discovered is true?"

"Certainly."

"Then you have your trouble for your pains," was the retort. "I am no fool, though born, perhaps, under an evil star."

"You will confess to nothing—not even to receiving the note from the woman called Stella?"

"I will confess to nothing."

The Falcon seemed to believe for a moment that he had met a foe worthy of his steel.

"Very well," cried he, stepping back and reaching out for the doorknob. "We will meet later. You shall see proofs in abundance. You shall stand face to face with the guilt which is now fixed upon the right person. I did not reach the bottom of the pit underneath the floor of the Eureka. I did not break my neck when Deuce O'Diamonds touched the button underneath the carpet."

"And now propose to drag me into it somewhere along the line," laughed Nixon Nox, sarcastically.

"I am going to drag the guilty into it too deep for them to escape."

"That's right; and if you ever need help don't fail to draw on me."

This was the acme of effrontery and sarcasm, and the detective saw the vicious flash which followed the words in the city sharp's eyes.

He had just heard a footstep beyond the door, and believed that Reva was waiting to be called back.

He opened the door and glanced into the hall, but did not catch sight of Ramon Rolfe's ward.

At the same moment Nixon Nox advanced across the carpet.

"One moment," said he. "Shut the door, please, Mr. Flynn."

The detective obeyed, and as he stepped back he saw the hand of the city sharp leap from his coat pocket, and the next instant a revolver was looking him in the face.

His own weapon was in his grip—his fingers wound about it ready for use, but the suspect was a little too quick for him.

"One moment, only one," continued Nixon Nox. "I know that you are famous for getting to the end of mysteries without being tripped. I have heard of you. The note, please!"

"It is yours, then?"

"Yes. The jet is near you. Please hold it over the blaze and let it burn."

The Falcon did not hesitate, but drew forth the pinkish paper and thrust it into the flame of the gas-jet.

"There; that will do! Now, Falcon Flynn, let me tell you that when you accuse me of killing Ramon Rolfe you are far from the target; but let me warn you that you have but a few hours to live. You can depart now!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

GETTING AT IT.

Out on the sidewalk, in front of the murdered man's mansion, the Falcon felt the breeze on his flushed cheeks.

The last words of Nixon Nox still rang in his ears, and he saw that quick action was needed.

The city sharp was alone with Reva, but the detective knew that the girl could take care of herself and he had no fears for her.

In half a minute he stood in front of the policeman on the beat, an old friend and a brave man, and, touching him on the arm, he said:

"Watch the Rolfe mansion, Cappers. A man will emerge presently. You will arrest him."

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "On what charge?"

"Murder!"

"Not for the Rolfe murder, I hope?"

"Tell him so if he asks about the cause of his arrest."

Cappers bowed, for he was a man of duty, and the special walked on.

"We shall see now," said he to himself, as he thought of Nixon Nox and his threat. "Now for the golden nest."

Detective Flynn, eager to find something which, as yet, had not turned up in the game, bent his steps toward another part of the city and in due time found himself on the steps leading to Nixon Nox's rooms.

He did not know that in the parlor Stella, the woman in black, was waiting for the sharp's return, but she was there.

The detective entered the hall, for the door was not locked, and stopped there to look at a coat which had been carelessly thrown over one of the horns of the hat-rack.

In another moment, however, he had ascended the staircase and opened a door on the second floor—the door of Nixon Nox's bedroom.

Fitted up with the same luxury that made the parlor a palace, this chamber was a dream of wealth, and for a moment the detective stopped just beyond the threshold and took it in.

He had closed the door behind him, and in a little while was inspecting a wardrobe which occupied one side of the room.

"Why, he's come back and is up-stairs," said Stella, starting as she heard some one cross the floor overhead, a light doze preventing her from hearing any one enter the house, and the next moment she stood in the hall listening.

"This is strange. It is past my comprehension that he should come back and not look in upon me. Has he failed? Did he lose the prize of the play? If he did I shall hold him up to the keenest ridicule."

She sprang up-stairs, her white face seamed with rage, and went down the corridor toward Nixon's door.

"Getting ready to slip out against my knowledge," she almost hissed. "Beware, Nixon Nox! You can't afford to play false to me!"

Her hand was thrust out to open the door when it swung inward on its hinges and she came face to face with—Falcon Flynn, the ferret-sport.

No cry on Stella's part; she merely fell back and looked at the ferret, beholding in him, as it were, her doom.

He looked at her with a smile of astonishment and satisfaction, and for a moment the pair stood thus.

"You were not looking for me?" queried the detective, calmly.

"Not for you; that's a fact."

"Very well; so much the better. You are Stella or, in other words, Mrs. Stemway, the woman in black."

She flushed deeply.

"You may call me what you please. I am not bound to enlighten you."

"Just as you like, madam. Shall we go down and talk?"

"I don't intend to talk," said she, with venom in her flashing eyes.

"Oh, that's all right."

She gave him a look of hatred, and shrank back along the wall, where she suddenly stopped and glared at him.

"What have you done with him? Surely you would not dare to come to this house without having put him out of the way, for the present?"

"Nixon Nox will not come home for some time," assured the Falcon. "We will not be interrupted."

Her hand went to her bosom, but quickly came out again. In the light that came into the corridor a dagger flashed.

"You will stand off!" she cried. "You shall not lay hands on me."

"Madam, is that the blade that finished Tom Haverstraw?"

She did not speak.

"This is the same house, too. Haverstraw left on the blotter on the table, left it there, when in the agonies of death—a clew which almost named the hand that took his life."

Stella sidled toward the head of the stairs, but the hand of the detective caught her wrist in a grip of steel and rendered useless the blade she had flashed in his face.

"Listen to reason," said he. "You have not been accused of anything yet. You have not been arrested. So far as I know, no charges have been preferred against you. Do you want to convict yourself?"

Stella tried to break loose from the grip, but it was useless; the hand of the ferret seemed to sink to the very bone.

"Let us go down. The parlor is a better place for our talk than here."

"What were you after in that room?"

"Ah, you heard me, did you?"

"I heard you and I thought it was Nixon."

"Just so. Wait. We will not go down just yet. You may be able to assist me in my search."

"Your search for what?"

"For the coat he wore the night he rode in the Park with Ramon Rolfe."

Stella gave Falcon a strange, startled look, and for half a second she seemed ready to sink at his feet.

"It must be in there," continued the ferret-sport.

"Why must you have it? Is that the missing link, think you?"

"I want that coat, madam."

"Release me, then, but the finding of it would do you no good."

He did not release her, but led her into the room and turned upon her there.

"Now," said Stella, as she looked at him, "tell me what you have done with him."

"He is under arrest."

"Arrested for the crime of the Park?"

"Yes, for the murder of Ramon Rolfe."

"Then he has lost the game."

"He has lost it. Madam, you know what coat he wore that night."

"I? How can that be?"

"This is the note you sent him that day," and the ferret pulled forth the patched-up note found in the grate in Hamish Kent's retreat.

She gave it a quick look as it lay in his hand, and with a shudder turned her face away.

"He tore it up instead of burning it, like a fool. I had until a while ago a duplicate of this note. The duplicate I burned, at his command, over Miss Rolfe's gas jet. I was in the toils then, and a revolver looked me in the face. But this is the real note—the one you sent, the one in which you asked him to be at the Park gate with Ramon Rolfe, the victim, by eight o'clock sharp. He was a trifle ahead of time."

Stella did not reply, but her face assumed a whiter hue and her gaze for an instant wandered toward the door.

"I may tell you right here that Hamish Kent, the maker of the death needles, has been unearthed," continued the Falcon. "I have picked him up as an important link in the chain, and you know, madam, that the deadly machine came from his hands."

She was silent.

"More than this; you are the woman who robbed Miss Kent on the train. You changed valises with her and got possession of the unfinished bit of work which she was bringing to this city."

Stella smiled for the first time, and her saturnine face looked strangely under the sudden metamorphosis.

"She came to you with the other valise, did she?" she asked. "I had to do it."

"No doubt of that. You were sent thither for that purpose, and you played your hand well. Hamish Kent remembered leaving some pieces of his terrible workmanship about the place, and they had to be found in order to keep the police from the trail."

"I have nothing to say when it comes to this point," replied Stella. "I confess nothing, understand."

"I understand; but don't you see that the net has brought the fish to shore? The night you came to Doctor Julius's office and robbed him of the two steel needles I was in the laboratory."

"You were? Ah, had I but known that!" cried Stella. "Falcon Flynn, if I had but dreamed that you were so near I would not now be standing here facing you in this room."

The Falcon did not doubt that.

"You will not tell me where to find the coat he wore that night?"

"I will not."

There was defiance in word and mien, and the ferret-sport knew with whom he was dealing.

"Very well," said he, coolly. "You will take things as they come without a murmur, then. Your husband, Doctor Julius, will have to explain a few things connected with the past."

"About me?" she cried. "Do you mean to drag from him the past as we have lived it?"

"Why not? I am going to the bottom of this mystery and all that is dark shall be made plain—plain as day."

"I don't ask you to spare me," she exclaimed. "You might, however, spare him. Though my husband, no one knows it in this city. I don't see where you picked up the secret."

"You forget, madam, that there are other keepers of secrets in New York besides yourself. Doctor Julius's lost child—"

A wild cry burst from the woman's lips, and she sprang toward the detective.

"You have found that out, too, have

you? Oh, you implacable hunter of secrets! you merciless tiger of the trail!"

She recoiled as suddenly as she had sprang forward, and stood over against the wall with the whitest of faces as she eyed the ferret-sport madly.

"Madam, you robbed your own flesh and blood!"

Stella threw up her hands and seemed to reel, but the detective saved her from falling and led her to a seat.

"With Nixon Nox under arrest don't you think you ought to save others?"

"Doctor Julius?"

"Doctor Julius for one."

"And myself?"

"Yes."

"But, against you I can make no successful fight," she groaned. "I am powerless, but if you will release me, and give me the blade which you wrested from me a while ago, I will rid the world of one of its most terrible human man-hunters. I will rob the police department of this city of one of its most implacable trackers."

The Falcon looked down at her with a smile, and then across the room to where the dagger lay on the floor.

"You understood how to send the steel needle to its mark in spite of the Park shadows," said he, slowly.

In an instant the woman was on her feet.

"For once you are at fault! I did not kill Ramon Rolfe. What! I send the death needle into his heart? Falcon Flynn, keen as you are, you are not yet at the end of your trail."

"Thanks for your words, madam! You have furnished me with the missing link."

Stella's look became a stare of impotent rage.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE END OF CRIME'S TETHER.

Roundsman Cappers followed his instructions.

When the city sharp emerged from the Rolfe mansion he found himself face to face with the mild-faced policeman, and when he stepped upon the sidewalk he felt the hand of Cappers close on his arm.

It instantly flashed through the young man's mind that this was Falcon Flynn's parting shot.

He turned upon the roundsman, and said in sharp tones:

"Do you know what you've done, sir?"

"I hope I do," was the quiet reply.

"I've just arrested you."

"He told you to, did he?"

"Never mind that." Cappers never liked to have his motives questioned. "You can explain at headquarters. Just now you will go with me."

It was the inevitable.

Nixon ceased to protest, and was marched off.

An hour after this arrest, and while yet the city knew but little of it outside of police circles, a man might have been seen packing into a valise some bits of machinery, while over him stood a person who watched him intently.

"You don't happen to have a complete machine with you?" asked the looker-on.

"No; but I have all the main parts here, and I can demonstrate the workings of a completed model to the superintendent."

Hamish Kent proceeded and finished his work, after which he took a seat and crossed his legs.

"It all seems like a dream to me," he went on, looking into the face of his companion, Falcon Flynn. "I'll have hard work making some people believe that I didn't do the work myself; but, you see, I can convince you and the superintendent; so what do I care for the rest?"

"My inventive genius has proved a curse to me. I have been too sharp for the public good, and I reckon they'll curtail my industry from now on."

He smiled as he spoke and for a moment fixed his eyes on the valise.

"They ferreted me out over in Jersey just as you have hunted the band down," he proceeded, seeing that the detective was waiting for him to tell all. "They fastened upon me like an octopus, for they knew that I could make just what they wanted made. First, the woman—Stella—"

came, and you have seen her, with her black eyes and insinuating smile. Then Nixon Nox came also, and got me completely in the toils. It was a plot; they wanted one of my deadly boxes, which I intended to offer some day to one of the crowned heads of Europe.

"What did they offer me? It was a pile almost fabulous, and I consented. Then came the disappearance—for I could not remain at Fernbank and carry out all the provisions of the agreement.

"Manta lost me suddenly, did she?" he laughed. "She stood it as long as she could and then came to New York to find the missing genius of Jersey."

"You don't say that Manta is your child?" queried the listening sport.

"Not at all! Haven't you got at that secret yet? It belongs to the game."

"I know that. Manta knows that she is a waif—that the secret of her parentage is in your bosom, and that's why she came to the city to run you down."

"Which she has done; but it don't seem to do her any good, yet. I might seal my lips forever, but I don't think there's any occasion for that."

"None at all unless you want to worry the worthy girl the rest of her days."

"What does Stella say?"

Kent asked this question in an anxious tone, and watched the detective keenly.

"Stella is close-mouthed," was the reply. "She says nothing when asked about Manta. I know that she once got from Hylo Jack the plan of the interior of Mother Iron-Hand's house and that shortly afterward Manta was robbed of a document which she had written out since coming to New York."

"Robbed Manta, did she? The vulture!" cried Hamish Kent. "Well, what else could you expect of her? After killing the detective, Haverstraw—"

"That's a bold charge, Kent."

"Bold, but none the less true!" asseverated the inventor. "Why, sir, she held him against the wall of Nixon Nox's house and done him to death in her swift way. And she's Doctor Julius's wife, too; you know that?"

"I know that. You needn't tell me that little secret."

Kent was silent for a moment.

"But here's one which I think you haven't picked up yet," said he. "You don't know, perhaps, that she is Deuce O'Diamond's sister?"

"I'll admit that I never suspected such relationship."

"Which shows that the keenest of you detectives don't pick up all the threads. Now are you ready?"

The inventor picked up the little valise and kept a firm grip on it.

"You ought to find the coat, sir," said he, as they left the room.

"I've searched his wardrobe."

"And it wasn't there? Would you mind taking me to his house before you land me at the station?"

"Not at all."

"I spent nearly a week there before hiding elsewhere," continued Kent.

"And you think you know it pretty thoroughly?"

"I tried to get all over it. You didn't find the secret room back of the bed-chamber?"

"I did not. There is no sign of a door."

"Of course not."

In a little while the cab which carried the ferret-sport and the inventor pulled up in front of Nixon Nox's late abode and the two men alighted.

Kent, now as eager as a trail-hound, led the way into the house and stopped in the parlor.

"It was here you found Haverstraw, eh?" he queried, turning suddenly upon the detective, who had kept at his heels.

The Falcon nodded.

"Spots on the wall yet. See! Here's where she stood him up and cut him down like a Turk. No mercy in that woman, and Doctor Julius has found it out on many occasions. But the little room!"

They passed up-stairs, and Hamish Kent, crossing the floor of Nixon Nox's bedroom, began to tap on the wall.

"Ah, here it is!" cried he, looking over his shoulder with a grin of satisfaction as

a door opened and gave them a glimpse of a darkish wardrobe beyond.

The Falcon darted forward and thrust one arm into the place.

"You have it, eh? Pull it out!"

The detective did so and brought to view a dress-coat, at sight of which Hamish Kent nodded.

"That's it! That's the coat he wore when he went riding with Ramon Rolfe in the Park."

The detective was holding the garment between him and the light, when Hamish took it from his hands.

"Here's a little rent in the left side under the arm," said he. "What did he tell the coroner? He was sitting on the right side, driving, at the time. Ah! you can't notice the hole unless you hold the coat in the strongest light, for the needle makes but a mere puncture. But it is there. My life against a mackerel that in the pocket you will find the impression of the box."

Kent, as he spoke, turned the inside pocket of the coat wrong side out, and lo! there was seen in it an impression of an actagon box, half as large as a man's hand.

"It is the silent witness!" said the detective.

"Nothing less. In my valise is confirmation of all this. Now don't think you are at the end of the tangle, Falcon Flynn."

"Yes; but the woman—"

"She must have been in the Park that night. The note asked him to keep the appointment at eight, at the main gate. Stella went thither to see that it was well done."

The Falcon took the coat, shut the secret door in the wall, and both men went back to the cab.

Before the day vanished a little group of men might have been seen in the private office of the Superintendent of Police, and one, sitting bolt upright, a smile lingering at the corners of his well-chiseled lips, was talking.

This person was Nixon Nox.

He had not lost any of his courage.

On the table before him lay a lot of strange machinery; but he did not look toward that while he talked.

"When the game is lost and one is in the toils, as I am now, gentlemen," said he, "there is but one sensible thing to do, and that is confess."

"I have done so. I have kept nothing back. I have told you that I killed Ramon Rolfe by means of the needle-box which I carried in my pocket, and which was set off, as I have described. Hamish Kent, the inventor, could have told you this before, for I believe he suspected me all along."

"Ramon Rolfe and I could not agree. He opposed my marriage to his ward, Miss Reva, and we wanted his fortune. The woman you have arrested for complicity in the crime saw Ramon Rolfe fall from the carriage. She came to the Park to witness the workings of the deadly box. As the wife of Doctor Stemway, she had access to many secrets of which common people know nothing. She discovered Hamish Kent in the little Jersey town, but I managed the man after that."

"You know now that Manta Kent is not the inventor's child, but that she is, in fact, the offspring of Doctor Julius; hence, if Stella could have been left to herself a while longer I am confident she would have committed another crime, perhaps at Mother Iron-Hand's."

Nixon Nox ceased and the listeners looked in silence at the cool sport who now had run his tether.

"What did you intend to do with the papers which Hylo Jack stole from Hardia Hawley—the papers which were proofs that Reva was not Ramon Rolfe's child?"

Nixon smiled.

"We wanted to play another hand if the one we held should fail," he explained. "Of course it was a bold game, but we wanted money, and Ramon Rolfe had it. But for that man yonder," and he looked toward the Falcon, "but for that ferret, who never drops a clew when he has once picked it up, I would be one of the lucky men of Gotham, and you gentlemen, with

all your cunning, would be groping in the dark."

The city sharp picked up a cigar with all the sang froid of a practised villain and blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling.

But, all at once, he staggered to his feet, ground the end of the Havana between his teeth and pitched forward, with a cry!

The police and detectives in the office ran to where he lay, and some one raised him.

"Heavens! another death-box!" cried one, as a little box precisely like the one that lay on the table fell from his breast pocket.

The end had come for Nixon Nox.

It was afterward discovered that he had been visited by a man, who, from the meager description which the authorities could give, might have been Deuce O'Diamonds; but he was never run down.

Whoever that person was, he must have smuggled to Nixon Nox the inventor's deadly box.

But, whether he did or not, the career of the city sharp, who had played for high stakes, was ended.

Stella was tried for the murder of Tom Haverstraw, but as there was no direct evidence to convict her, though all believed she was guilty, she was declared "Not guilty." Then she vanished.

Doctor Julius vanished with her; but, a year later, he was found dead in their home in New Orleans, stabbed exactly as Haverstraw had been.

Reva Rolfe, as she was still called, married Hardin Hawley, and Manta Kent came forth from Mother Iron-Hand's to go back to Fernbank, where she, also, afterward became a bride.

Hamish Kent, the inventor, made himself scarce, for the police warned him to take his inventive genius as far from New York as possible, and he was eager to obey.

As for Hylo Jack, he turned up in the place best suited to his capacities, and a few months after the wind-up of Falcon Flynn's man-hunt, he was making the best of the "hospitalities" of Sing Sing.

The solving of the mystery that enshrouded Ramon Rolfe's death added much to the fame of Falcon Flynn, and he was permitted to keep in his museum of curiosities a little box which could have told the story of the Park crime if its strange mechanism had been endowed with the power of speech.

As it was, it told enough; for, with Hamish Kent to interpret his terrible invention, the mystery had been made plain.

Mother Iron-Hand is dead and forgotten, but her little house is still pointed out to those who care to investigate her history, and Manta no doubt often recurs to her brief and somewhat exciting sojourn there.

Marcie, the maid who fell under Stella's spell, never went back to Reva; but the Falcon could tell, if questioned, that she and her brother live in a little village up the Hudson.

It was a great game for a fortune; it opened with a dark crime in a beautiful park, and ended in utter failure and a detective's triumph.

It made Falcon Flynn the foremost detective of New York, and blotted out one of the most dangerous cabals that ever existed in the great city.

THE END.

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